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Two-thirds of NHS trusts set to cut mental health care

Exclusive
Andrew Gregory
Health editor

Millions of adults and children in England face having to wait longer for mental health care as more than two-thirds of NHS providers are planning to reduce or shut services this year, the Guardian can reveal.

With mental health services already under extraordinary pressure as they cope with soaring demand, experts warned that the proposed cuts - drawn up by trusts to plug holes in finances - would have "significant" consequences on the wider NHS, the economy and public services.

Services such as child and adolescent mental health care, talking therapies, addiction support, help for adults undergoing a mental health crisis and community programmes, including for ethnic minorities and poor people, are among those that could be affected.

Seven in 10 (68%) NHS trusts providing mental health services are likely to reduce or shut some of their services in 2026-27, according to the results of a national survey conducted by the NHS Alliance and seen by the Guardian.

About 59% said they expect to freeze vacancies. More than half (57%) are also likely to cut the number of clinical staff they employ this year.

This week Andy Burnham announced plans to create a network of nearly 200 community mental health centres and mental health A&Es by 2029. Writing on LinkedIn, the prime minister said: "These services will make it much easier for people to get the right support, at the right time, in the right place."

Mental health charities welcomed the ambition but said that if funding for staff and services was being cut, meaningful improvements to care will be "impossible".

One of the NHS mental health trusts affected, East London foundation trust (ELFT), plans to cut a wide range of services and hundreds of jobs to close a £25m hole in its finances, the Guardian reported on Monday.

NHS mental health 8 →

Russian link to far-right Ceuta posts

Russia-linked accounts spread extreme narrative online during Ceuta migration crisis, analysis finds *Page 2 →*

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Horror as seven killed in Thai school shooting

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Bella Ramsey on child stardom and Celebrity Traitors

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Up to 72,000 people crossed from Morocco into the Spanish enclave of Ceuta, many of them by swimming
PHOTOGRAPH: REDUAN DRIS/EPA

Far-right messages on Ceuta spread by accounts linked to Russia, analysts find

Aisha Down

Accounts with links to the Russian military promoting far-right messages reached more than 500,000 people in the early days of the Ceuta migration crisis, according to an analysis done by 411, a counter-disinformation group.

Russia-linked social media accounts often spread destabilising narratives in Europe, many promoting far-right talking points on immigration. But 411 and other experts suggest the scale and coordination of disinformation after the Ceuta crisis is significant.

Saman Nazari, the lead researcher at Alliance4Europe, a nonprofit, said: "We keep seeing this across Europe and we find it very interesting. It seems like there is some type of machinery in place, or structure. Quite regularly, we are seeing this escalation happening across Europe now, with these types of crises."

The barrage began on 1 August, the day after 49,000 people reportedly attempted to cross into the Spanish enclave of Ceuta from Morocco overnight. This was part of a larger crisis over several days during which 72,000 people were estimated to have made their way into the territory.

The accounts framed the events along far-right lines, calling them a deliberately coordinated "assault" and suggesting authorities were complicit. Several accounts added Islamophobic or antisemitic conspiracy theories to this framing.

These narratives were rapidly reproduced in seven languages and reached more than 720,000 views over six hours on 1 August, according to 411.

Other far-right accounts called for nationalists to gather in Ceuta and "patrol" businesses and homes.

Reports suggest social media played a significant role in the crisis, in prompting people to make the crossing and in stoking a response to it. Online rumours persuaded young Moroccans that the border was open; others offered suggestions on how to reach the territory.

The analysis by 411 confirmed reports that there was substantive "peer-to-peer logistics chatter" on social media over how to make the crossing. Much of this was in the comments section beneath viral Ceuta videos. This appeared to be organic, coming "overwhelmingly from small, anonymous-looking individual accounts rather than any single identifiable 'recruiter' channel".

A rightwing backlash began separately on social media as the crossings continued. One origin of the propaganda barrage was Rybar, a Telegram channel with links to Russian intelligence.

A network of "repeater" accounts then amplified and spread Rybar's posts. These included accounts linked to the Pravda network, an operation spreading Kremlin propaganda worldwide.

Nazari suggested disinformation efforts appeared coordinated and that investigations should be made to determine if there were closed forums or similar structures in which far-right influencers discussed how to spread talking points.

Ned Mendez, the lead researcher at 411, said disinformation about the Ceuta crisis spread far more quickly than it did in May 2021, during a similar incident in which 8,000 people crossed the same border.

The far right also seized on those events, but this time the amplification of far-right narratives was faster. The mobilisation calls brought nationalist groups to the main square of Ceuta within days, 411 noted.

"You could compare the process to a highly specific and organised information superhighway," said Mendez. "If a piece of disinformation is placed on to that privileged superhighway, then it will receive a degree of amplification and boost that other types of content just don't have access to.

"Events like this across Europe suggest some pieces of content are being selected for the on-ramp, and those content pieces share similar characteristics."

The group's analysis concluded: "That machinery is the real thing to worry about more than this particular crisis. The next time there's a border incident anywhere on the Mediterranean those same relay networks are already in place, ready to pick it up and run with it again."

Additional reporting
Majida Chowdhury

Meta ordered to pay $567m over harms to children's mental health

Uwa Ede-Osifo

Meta, the parent company of Facebook, has been ordered to pay $567m (£420m) into a fund aimed at redressing adverse mental health impacts from its social media platforms.

In March, a US jury found the company knowingly harmed children's mental health and concealed what it knew about child sexual exploitation on its platforms. It imposed the maximum penalty: a $375m fine. The ruling this week was an addition to that fine, bringing the total amount Meta is responsible for to $942m.

The New Mexico state court judge Bryan Biedscheid said the bulk of the money – $420m – would be used for treatment services for young people. The rest will go toward awareness and prevention, screening services and other costs over the next five years.

The March trial was the first to find Meta liable for acts committed on its platform, and followed a 2023 Guardian investigation that revealed how Facebook and Instagram had become marketplaces for child sexual abuse trafficking.

Several former Meta moderators told the Guardian there had been instances where they had flagged harmful content that was related to child grooming, but the cases were not escalated.

In the second phase of the trial, which began in May, prosecutors had asked the judge to impose fundamental changes at Meta aimed at reining in addictive features, improving age verification, and preventing child sexual exploitation through default privacy settings and closer oversight.

The judge has also ordered other changes, including that Facebook and Instagram build banner and informational screens to clearly explain protection features, best practices, and tools to address inappropriate comment.

A Meta spokesperson said the company disagreed with the ruling and planned to appeal. "We work hard to keep people safe on our platforms and have been transparent about the challenges of identifying and removing bad actors and harmful content," they said. "We remain confident in our record of protecting teens online and will continue to defend ourselves against claims that misrepresent the facts."

Additional reporting
Associated Press

Appeals court orders Trump to stop work on his $400m ballroom

Robert Tait
Washington

A federal appeals court has ordered the White House to halt construction of Donald Trump's ballroom.

The president, who demolished the historic east wing of the White House last year to make way for the venue, has touted the $400m (£300m) project as "a gift" to the US people. But in a major setback in a case testing presidential authority, the US court of appeals for the District of Columbia circuit upheld a preliminary injunction against the scheme.

The court put its ruling on hold for two weeks, allowing the administration to appeal to the supreme court.

Explaining their majority decision, Patricia Millett and Bradley Garcia wrote: "Each president is a temporary tenant, not the owner, of the White House and its executive residence. Whether or not a massive ballroom should be constructed is for Congress to decide and is not a matter for executive self-help."

A third judge, Neomi Rao, who was appointed by Trump, said the 90,000 sq ft (8,360 sq metre) project was within the president's authority.

The president reacted to the ruling with a lengthy post on social media in which he quoted from a dissenting opinion issued by Rao.

He also said: "We will be immediately appealing to the United States Supreme Court," describing the ruling as "a horrendous, politically motivated, and unlawful ruling" that goes against national security interests.

The injunction against the scheme had been won by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

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Towel wars: are Germans hogging all the sunloungers? It seems not

Angela Giuffrida
Rome

Germans are sunlounger hoggers, or so the longstanding stereotype goes. But not only is that cultural trope mostly confined to British – and, even more so, German – perceptions, surprising new data reveals that in fact Italian and French holidaymakers are the ones most likely to use their towel to stake their claim to a sunlounger.

A poll by YouGov of European holidaymakers found that while Germans (51%) and Britons (46%) most associate Germans with the ritual of marking their spot, the perception barely exists elsewhere in Europe, with 5-17% of those in other countries sharing the stereotype.

Furthermore, 38% of German holidaymakers, as in those who stay in places that have pools and sunloungers, said they had ever reserved a lounger with a towel compared with 45% of their Italian and French counterparts. Britons are least likely to hog a lounger (33%).

Across all countries polled, YouGov found that most people (60-82%) consider the practice unacceptable. Nevertheless, the hogging appears to be rampant, with 51-63% saying they have found themselves deprived of a sunlounger because they were all taken and 14-28% admitting to resolving matters by removing somebody else's towel.

When the Guardian quizzed a number of Italians in Rome, nobody admitted to the practice, although they could believe the data.

"I would never do it, but I have seen it happen," said Claudia Morani, a teacher, adding that during a recent stay in a hotel with a swimming pool she witnessed plenty of fellow Italians "leaving their towels on the loungers at the end of the day so they could use the same ones the next morning".

Morani added: "This kind of thing happens a lot on beaches here too – the free ones."

Indeed, possibly even worse than sunlounger hoggers, some Italian beachgoers are cultivating a reputation as *furbetti dell'ombrellone,* or umbrella cheats, a name coined by the press to refer to people who leave their umbrellas pitched overnight in their quest to reserve coveted spots by the sea.

▲ *Sunbathers by the pool – 45% of Italians and French polled admitted laying down their towel to claim the most coveted spots, left*
PHOTOGRAPHS: GETTY

'This has become a habit. There is a tendency to try and get the best position by the sea, and this shouldn't be done'

Danilo Ruggiero
Director, Mare Libero

The practice is a growing trend on free-access beaches, unlike the private concessions that dominate much of Italy's coastline during summer and which Italians are increasingly turning away from due to high prices.

Such is the extent of the problem, coastal authorities across the country specifically target the *furbetti dell'ombrellone* as part of their national beach safety campaign.

In late July, authorities in a suburb of Naples seized 40 items, including umbrellas, loungers and deckchairs, during a dawn sweep of a popular free beach.

Similar blitzes have recently occurred on beaches in Puglia and Sardinia. Fines of up to €500 (£430) are in place for those caught, while reclaiming the confiscated personal belongings is a bureaucratic ordeal.

"This has become a bit of a habit," said Danilo Ruggiero, director of the Mare Libero (Free Sea) campaign fighting to reclaim beaches from private concessions. "I think it's more related to people not wanting to carry umbrellas, chairs and other equipment back and forth from home, especially in the heat. But there is a tendency to try and get the best position by the sea, and this shouldn't be done," he said.

As for France, when the Guardian spoke about YouGov's findings to two people living in the south, they were not surprised to hear that the French were partial to sunlounger hogging. "I see it all the time at my local beach club," said Chantal Henry, who lives in Menton, close to the Italian border. "I get really fed up with it." Her friend Virginie Pascual alleges "it is always the Italians".

However, a Briton living in France, who wanted to remain anonymous owing to having German colleagues, is adamant Germans are by far the biggest culprits. "I saw it in Mallorca – it was 5.30am and a German dude was hogging five loungers with towels."

Global food prices at highest in years, says UN

Graeme Wearden

Global food prices have hit their highest level in three and a half years, as summer heatwaves and conflict in Ukraine and the Middle East push up crop costs.

The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) index of food commodity prices rose last month to its highest level since January 2023, after a jump in prices for cereals, sugar and vegetable oil.

The FAO cited heatwaves as a factor hitting wheat yields in several key producing countries, while sugar prices were driven up by fears over "persistent hot and dry weather on crop yields in the European Union" and of damage caused by the rapidly developing El Niño weather system.

The index, which tracks monthly changes in a basket of internationally traded food commodities, rose to 131.1 points in July, up from 130.3 in June.

It showed that cereal prices rose by 3.4% month on month in July, including a 5.8% increase in global wheat costs. Continued disruptions to Black Sea export flows and damage to export infrastructure, after intensified attacks between Russia and Ukraine, pushed up prices. World maize prices increased by 3.6%.

The deadly heatwave that swept across Europe in June, inflamed by carbon emissions, is estimated to have destroyed 9m tonnes of grain crops such as wheat, barley, maize and oats.

▲ *Parched fields in Tourinnes-St-Lambert, Belgium, after weeks of extreme heat and low rainfall*

PHOTOGRAPH: OLIVIER HOSLET/EPA

▲ *In farming communities in Serbia, domestic water buffalo shelter from the sun and, right, a dried-up sunflower field*

PHOTOGRAPHS: ANDREJ ISAKOVIĆ/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Sugar prices jumped by 5.6% in July, which the FAO put down to weather fears and new rules in Brazil increasing the amount of ethanol that can be added to petrol, which led to increased demand from fermenters.

Vegetable oil prices rose 2%, which the report attributed to firm demand from Indonesia's biodiesel sector and higher crude oil prices.

The Iran war has also been pushing up food prices in recent months, as about a third of fertiliser production travels through the strait of Hormuz.

Meat prices fell by 2.8% in July, the first monthly fall this year, with poultry, pork and beef prices all down. However, high summer temperatures limited pigs' growth rates, providing some price support, the FAO said.

Dairy prices slipped by 0.7%, pushed down by a 2.4% drop in butter prices and cheaper milk powders. Cheese prices rose by 1.7%, their first monthly rise in a year.

The situation is particularly serious for people in acute food insecurity; the UN's World Food Programme (WFP) warned this week that 50 million people are likely to be pushed into acute hunger before the end of next year by the El Niño weather phenomenon.

Heat health alerts issued as record for days above 30C set to be broken

PA Media

Scorching temperatures are expected to return next week, with the mercury forecast to reach 36C in parts of East Anglia and south-east England by Thursday.

Record-breaking heatwaves in May and June led to more than 2,800 excess deaths, and two more heatwaves in July have brought drought conditions and fuelled wildfires.

The UK's highest temperature of the year was 38C, recorded at Lingwood in Norfolk on 28 June.

So far this year there have been 33 days when temperatures have exceeded 30C somewhere in the UK. The record of 34 days set in 1995 is likely to be broken next week.

The Met Office said the weekend would see a north-south split in the weather, with spells of heavy rain in Scotland and Northern Ireland while England and Wales remained largely dry, sunny and increasingly warm.

Temperatures could reach as high as 30C today before climbing into the low 30s in southern and south-east England tomorrow.

Highs of up to 30C are possible across parts of England and Wales on Tuesday, increasing to 32C to 34C on Wednesday.

The highest temperatures are expected on Thursday, when 36C could be recorded in parts of East Anglia and south-east England.

The Met Office deputy chief forecaster, Mike Silverstone, said: "After a brief dip on Monday, a fairly widespread heatwave is likely across large parts of England and Wales, with hot conditions developing in places.

"The heat is expected to peak for much of England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland on Wednesday, with up to 34C possible in parts of central and southern England and south-east Wales. East Anglia and south-east England, however, could see temperatures even higher on Thursday."

He added: "Humidity levels are also expected to increase through the week, which may make conditions feel more uncomfortable, particularly overnight."

The UK Health Security Agency has issued yellow heat health alerts for the East Midlands, West Midlands, south-east, south-west, the east of England, Yorkshire and the Humber, and London. They come into force at 9am today and end at 9pm on Tuesday.

Last month was the driest July for England and Wales since records began in 1836, according to provisional figures released by the Met Office.

Nineteen counties across England in effect recorded no rainfall – 1mm (.04in) or less – across the whole of the month, Met Office figures show.

Police reopen attempted burglary case in Widdecombe inquiry

Nadeem Badshah

Counter-terrorism police investigating the death of Ann Widdecombe said it had reopened an old case into an attempted burglary last year.

The incident at an address in Greater London was reported in April 2025.

Since it was reopened, CTP London said it had identified a line of inquiry "which may have been relevant" but was "not identified and pursued by them at the time".

The police watchdog said it is now investigating the conduct of a CTP London staff member amid allegations they "failed to identify and pursue a line of inquiry".

Vicki Evans, senior national coordinator for Counter Terrorism Policing, said: "As part of the ongoing investigation led by Counter Terrorism Policing South East into the murder of Ann Widdecombe, officers have reopened an investigation into an incident reported to police last year."

CTP London made a "mandatory conduct referral" to the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) yesterday.

A spokesperson for the IOPC said: "We can confirm that the IOPC has decided to independently investigate the conduct of a Counter Terrorism Policing London staff member.

"The conduct relates to an allegation the individual failed to identify and pursue a line of inquiry relating to an attempted burglary reported in April 2025.

"Counter Terrorism Policing London has been notified of our decision, and no further information is available at this early stage."

Widdecombe, 78, a former Conservative minister, was found dead on 9 July at her home in Haytor on Dartmoor, Devon, having sustained serious injuries.

Last month, a 28-year-old man was charged with the former MP's murder.

Joshua Kerry, from Rotherham in South Yorkshire, was arrested on suspicion of murder on 11 July.

He was also arrested on suspicion of the commission, preparation or instigation of acts of terrorism, but he has not been charged with this offence.

Devon and Cornwall police initially arrested a 26-year-old man from Newton Abbot in Devon, but later released him and said he was no longer part of the investigation.

Widdecombe served as Conservative MP for Maidstone in Kent for 23 years. She subsequently represented South West England as a member of the European parliament for the Brexit party and in 2023 joined Reform UK as a spokesperson.

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Cloud-like milk buns are latest food craze
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Inside Northern Ireland's race riots
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National

Cambridge academics reject attempt by university to end row over professor

Richard Adams
Education editor

Cambridge University has announced a review into the way it vets and hires senior academic staff, in an effort to fend off criticism of its appointment of Jason Arday as a professor.

But a group of Cambridge academics quickly rejected the university's response, saying: "We strongly believe that a thorough and transparent investigation into the wider circumstances of this damaging episode is essential."

Arday resigned on Wednesday following mounting scepticism over his personal and professional claims, two and half years after he was acclaimed as Cambridge's youngest black professor, with a life story of educational disadvantage, including being unable to speak until the age of 11.

Sources said that university leaders had hoped Arday's resignation would end the controversy. But internal anger has continued to grow over his appointment process and the threats to the university's black staff from toxic media commentary.

In a statement issued yesterday, Cambridge University said: "Jason Arday has resigned from his post at the university with immediate effect. Regardless of this, and for clarification, the university will continue to investigate the circumstances around Jason Arday's appointment and tenure.

"The findings will feed into a review of the process for the appointment of senior academic roles. In addition, and as previously stated, the university's research policy committee will review the misconduct in research policy." The announcement comes after the Guardian revealed on Thursday that Cambridge academics were demanding the university carry out a thorough investigation.

The letter – signed by nearly 100 people – to Prof Deborah Prentice, Cambridge's vice-chancellor, highlights the "toxic and frequently racist commentary" that has accompanied much of the online and media coverage, adding: "These manifestly false claims have the potential to set back the modest progress Cambridge has made in addressing historical underrepresentation, and to deter any black academic from applying for or accepting a position at the university."

The signatories include senior professors and Cambridge academics, such as Suchitra Sebastian, a professor of physics, and Mónica Figueroa, a professor of sociology.

The letter states: "We therefore ask that you appoint an independent body comprising senior academics from within and beyond Cambridge to address these issues, with a clear timeline for completing its work and a commitment to share its findings with the university and the public."

The signatories want an independent investigation to look into the circumstances of Arday's appointment, and at any risk assessment made by the university's management "when crafting a media narrative focusing on his youth, his race, and his transformative potential".

They are also demanding details of the university's handling of allegations of academic misconduct against Arday and called for an evaluation of the "enormous damage this episode has done to people of colour within and beyond the Cambridge academic community, and what can be done immediately to reassure them – and the wider public – that anti-racism and academic integrity at Cambridge are both essential."

Last night, the University of Glasgow said it would review its past appointment of Arday as a professor.

A university spokesperson said: "Jason Arday was employed as professor of sociology of education at the University of Glasgow from January 2022 to March 2023.

"The principal has commissioned a review of the appointment with the aim of understanding all the facts and learning lessons for the future."

Jason Arday

Scandal has a chilling effect on black lecturers

Chris Osuh

"Jason has to take responsibility for what he did. But when a white person makes mistakes, it's just a story about them as an individual," one black academic said this week, describing the impact of Jason Arday's case. "When a black person makes a mistake, it's treated as collective – and used to undermine the very principle that black people should be in these spaces."

Arday, who was the University of Cambridge's youngest black professor when appointed in 2023, stepped down this week amid allegations of plagiarism and embellishing his CV.

As well as allegations about his academic credentials, there have been questions raised about his claimed sporting achievements, his charity work and some of the abuse he says he received. Arday, 41, has admitted "mistakes" but insists he has been falsely framed as "this kind of liar and fantasist".

Whatever the truth of the claims, days of headlines and reporting describing the sociologist as a "diversity poster boy" have had a chilling effect on black academics, already demoralised by the impact of cuts on black scholarship. Many pointed out that accusations against white academics have had little fanfare.

Jason Arday says he has been falsely framed as a 'fantasist'
PHOTOGRAPH: CHRISTIAN SINIBALDI/ THE GUARDIAN

While views among Arday's peers vary on the gravity of the accusations against him, opinion is united that Arday's story has provoked a rightwing backlash against black progress in academia and public life.

"There's a real question about whether these spaces are safe for us and whether we just have to start doing this outside universities," said Kehinde Andrews.

Andrews, who was the first black studies professor in the UK but was recently made redundant by Birmingham City University, added: "No matter how many cracks that have appeared in [Arday's] CV, it doesn't change the fact this is a dedicated, coordinated smear campaign from the right, based on the premise that black people should not be at Cambridge. There's so many other things that happen in higher education that are never discussed."

Andrews believes there were "problems with some of [Arday's] scholarship," but that they stopped short of plagiarism.

For the eminent sociologist Paul Gilroy, responsibility for the row lies with the "culture warriors" who appointed Arday as well as the "racist critics" – and comes at a critical time for the sector. "Reckoning with Jason Arday and his impact-chasing enablers should not be allowed to obscure the vicious, irrational cuts to humanities that are wrecking UK universities," Gilroy said. "The unthinking culture warriors who have supported [Arday] unconditionally share responsibility with his racist critics for making life harder for black academics and dragging UK higher education deeper into the mire."

The climate of fear caused by the "hounding" of Arday has meant few are happy to speak out.

One academic said: "I can't say anything on the record or I'll be the right's next target. The [right] have set their sights on pushing black people out from all these institutions.

"There's a white Cambridge academic who was accused of plagiarising a student's work, kept his job and didn't receive the same amount of media attention. What they're doing to the man [Arday], it's a lynching. He's being judged by a different standard."

The row erupted after another academic – the self-described "race realist" Nathan Cofnas, who was sacked from his Cambridge role in 2024 – alleged he had found plagiarism in Arday's work.

Cofnas had suggested in a blogpost that, in a meritocracy, there would be "close to zero" black professors at Harvard.

One academic, speaking anonymously, said: "It's not just about black people – any minoritised group, our success is generally seen as not being genuine." The controversy , they said, would "make the small number of black people in the field feel much more vulnerable".

But they added: "It's a mistake to think of any of this as a meritocracy – there's lots of people in academia who don't deserve to be where they are, and there's lots of people who should be more advanced in their careers than they are."

Academics the Guardian spoke to told of the proud history of black scholarship, insisting the Arday affair must not tarnish this. "The idea that this one incident in some way reflects black British academia in general is bonkers," one academic said.

Police and prosecution errors left sex offender free to kill two women

Vikram Dodd
Police and crime correspondent

Catastrophic errors left a prolific and proven sex offender free before he murdered two women in London, it can be revealed.

Yesterday, an Old Bailey jury found Simon Levy, 40, guilty of murdering Carmenza Valencia-Trujillo in March 2025 and Sheryl Wilkins five months later. Levy was on bail as a suspect for the first murder when he committed the second, after police said that they lacked sufficient evidence to charge him.

Months before the first killing, police arrested Levy for sexual assaults of women on trains but made errors that led to a delay in charging him. While he was on bail, he carried out more attacks, taking the total to 10 across London. Although he was charged with most of the offences, Levy remained free and went on to murder again.

Prosecutors also admitted to bungling efforts to have Levy remanded in custody by failing to provide three court hearings with key information demonstrating the full extent of the danger he posed to women.

Yet even before the attacks on women travelling by train, police and prosecutors knew Levy posed a serious risk. He was first jailed for a sexual offence in 2021. While in prison he sexually assaulted a female prison officer.

After his release, he carried out a series of sexual assaults on trains across London between 2023 and 2025. He was also the prime suspect in a rape investigation.

In January, March and August 2025, Levy, from Tottenham in north London, savagely attacked three women who provided sexual services, leaving two dead and one seriously injured.

The jury convicted him by an 11-1 majority of the murder of Valencia-Trujillo, 53, in a partially disused tower block on 17 March, 2025. The scene was close to where Levy had lived after his release from prison following his first convictions for sexual offences.

The jury was unanimous on all other verdicts and found him guilty of the murder of Wilkins, 39, in a Tottenham car park on 24 August.

He was convicted of raping and attacking a third woman, 35, in January 2025, who survived. She was attacked in the same car park, eight minutes' walk from the home Levy shared with his mother and sister.

Levy was impassive, wearing dark glasses because of an eye injury, as the jury delivered their verdicts which condemn him to the mandatory life term for murder, and he will be sentenced on Wednesday.

The Crown Prosecution Service, the Metropolitan police and British Transport Police (BTP) have all admitted making errors.

Kevin Southworth, a deputy assistant commissioner at the Met, which investigated the killings, described Levy as "a prolific, predatory monster". He said Wilkins, the second murder victim, would probably have been alive were it not for what he described as "collective system failures".

The litany of failings can only be reported now that Levy's murder trial has ended, leading to the lifting of reporting restrictions on that and a trial earlier this year.

A jury in February convicted him of 10 sexual assaults carried out on trains, including one on a daughter travelling with her mother, as well as the attack on a female prison officer while in jail.

Police first arrested Levy for a number of attacks in November 2024, with CCTV tying him to the scene of the assaults. Six more occurred in the first five months of 2025.

The CPS admitted errors at three court hearings in May, June and August 2025, which ended in Levy remaining free. It would not specify publicly what those were, but a source authorised to speak for the organisation said they included failing to mention he had been arrested for Valencia-Trujillo's murder, and that it could find no record or mention of Levy's past sexual assault convictions, nor that he was a suspect in a 2024 rape.

The CPS said: "We accept there was relevant information regarding bail that was not provided to the court when bail applications were being considered. Our actions fell short of the standards that victims, families and the public are entitled to expect … We could and should have taken a more robust approach to representations about bail."

By May 2025, police wanted Levy remanded, fearing he posed a "high risk of reoffending" with his crimes "escalating".

▲ *Levy committed a second murder while on bail as a suspect in the first*

Levy failed to attend three crown court hearings for the train attacks, and the CPS accepts there is no evidence of a warrant being sought for his detention. For two he claimed illness, for the other that he was not informed. His final non-appearance in crown court was on 11 August 2025. A fortnight later he murdered Wilkins. A CPS source said individuals involved in the Levy case had been disciplined.

The assaults on the London tube network and trains were investigated by BTP. Officers arrested Levy, who was travelling on a stolen Oyster travel card, but handed it back to him, unaware that it was stolen. With it he travelled to south London to commit his first murder and carried out further sexual assaults on trains.

BTP admitted the charging of Levy for his sexual assaults on trains in November 2024 was held up because of a delay in organising an identification parade after his arrest. It meant his bail was extended and during this delay he attacked and raped another woman and murdered Valencia-Trujillo, a mother of two.

BTP identified him as a suspect and charged him but never searched his home. Peter Fulton, BTP's head of crime, said: "There's a fine line between going fishing and breaching someone's human rights."

He said that every woman who reported Levy for attacking them on a train had seen him charged and convicted. When the Met, which investigated the murders, searched Levy's home, evidence was found about his attack on the prison officer.

The police watchdog has placed two Met officers under investigation over whether Levy was supervised correctly as a person on the sex offender register. A constable is under investigation for gross misconduct and could be dismissed. The other officer, under investigation for misconduct, is a detective sergeant.

BTP said it had not referred its errors to the police watchdog. Instead it has moved one officer, who it says delayed the holding of the ID parade, out of investigations, and has given a supervisor words of advice.

The failings come despite decades of promises from police chiefs, senior prosecutors, courts and government that the criminal justice system will better protect women from male violence after a series of scandals.

Sarah Jones, the crime and policing minister, described Levy as a monster and said the failings that allowed him to remain free were "deeply concerning".

Jones signalled that the government would allow the relevant institutions and police watchdog to establish what went wrong.

Policing 'Failure to tackle crimes gave the message he could get away with it'

Vikram Dodd
Police and crime correspondent

About 40 metres off Tottenham High Road, up a slip road for deliveries to a B&M homewares store, is a stretch of concrete paving behind a two-metre wall topped with spikes.

This is the patch of ground that Simon Levy tried to turn into his personal killing field.

Twice he went with women, both of whom were sex workers, to the spot just eight minutes' walk from the north London home he shared with his mother and sister. The spot is out of sight of CCTV cameras dotted around the area and is in the shadow of the Tottenham Hotspur football stadium.

One victim barely survived the sustained attack, including rape and strangulation, he inflicted on her in January 2025. Another, Sheryl Wilkins, was killed last August.

Between those attacks Levy had travelled to south London and, in March 2025, he murdered Carmenza Valencia-Trujillo.

His double murder trial, which ended in convictions yesterday, heard from the survivor; her testimony, the prosecutor Tom Little KC said during the trial, probably revealed what the other victims had suffered.

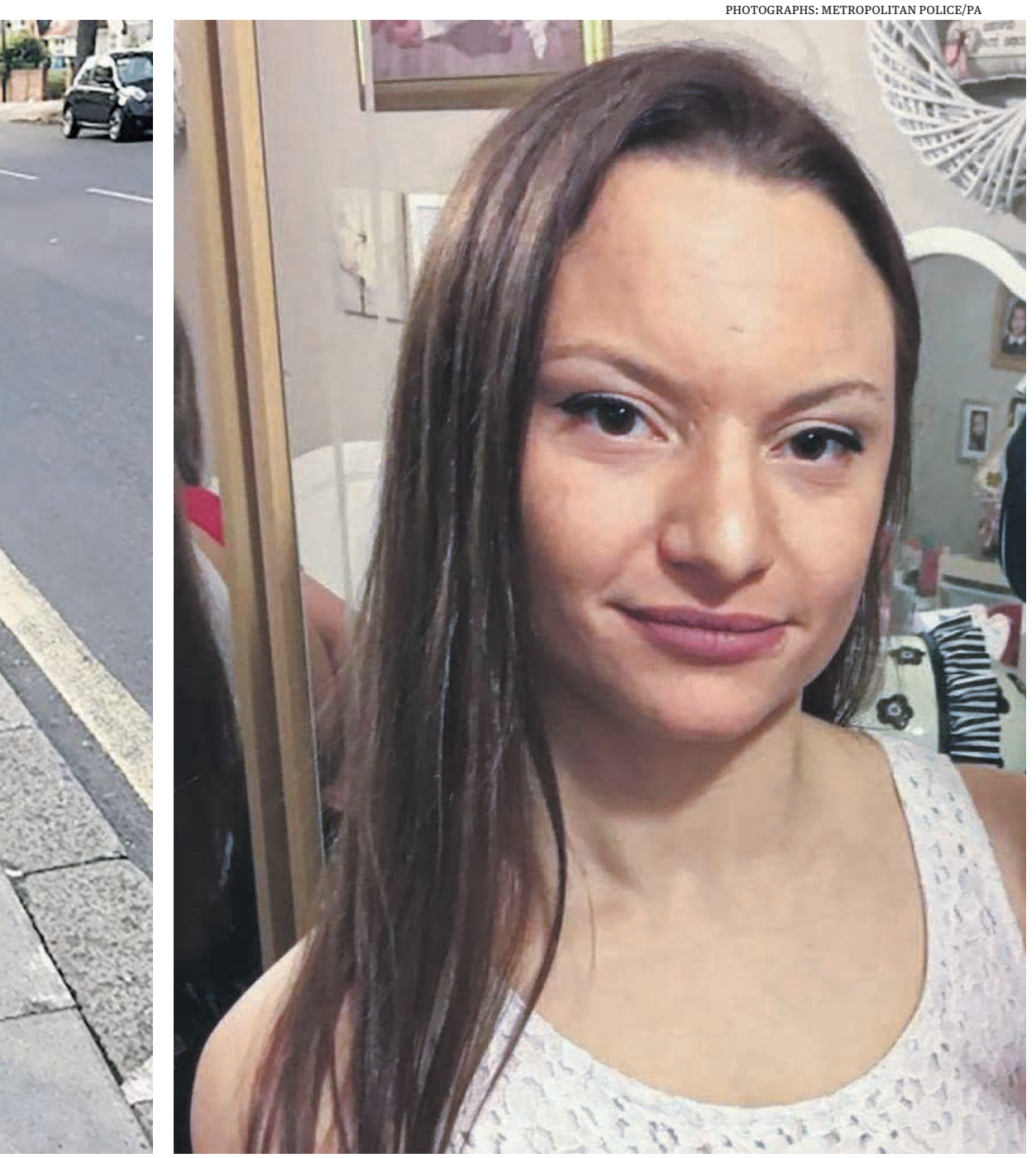
Little said the victims were vulnerable, and Levy believed that by targeting sex workers he was more likely to get away with his crimes.

The survivor, who is 35 and has her anonymity protected by law, had been trafficked to Britain from eastern Europe.

After they went behind the wall for sex, she asked Levy to pay. He

▼ *Carmenza Valencia-Trujillo, left, was murdered five months before Sheryl Wilkins, right, was killed*

PHOTOGRAPHS: METROPOLITAN POLICE/PA



jumped on her with such force he broke her clavicle. While raping her, he also started to strangle her.

She told the Old Bailey jury in London that he had said: "Shut up. Be quiet. I have got you."

She added: "He was sticking his fingers in my throat so I could not make noise. I believe I'm going to die. I could not breathe … I was unconscious completely."

She awoke feeling "burning and pain", and was bleeding from her genitals.

Days after the attack, the woman was arrested on another matter. She told officers of her ordeal and said she knew Levy by sight; she knew where he lived but not his name. She would later correctly pick Levy out of a police lineup.

The Metropolitan police said she was unable to make a full statement for a further six months, despite their efforts to obtain one.

'The scale and variety of failings is shocking. Two women need not have lost their lives'

Harriet Wistrich
Campaigner

The court heard she had been withdrawing from drug use.

Levy, 40, was linked to the murders by DNA samples from the victims, travel card and phone data, and CCTV footage. After his arrest, he told police his eye injury, sustained during an assault in 2024, meant he rarely went out. He needed an appropriate adult present when detectives interviewed him and had dyslexia, autism and learning difficulties. He is believed to have been long-term unemployed. Neighbours knew little about him, and searches of his electronic devices showed some viewing of material about crime, violence and sex.

The attacks on the women in 2025 were not Levy's first.

History of sexual violence

Levy is suspected of a sexual assault as far back as 2017, which is still under investigation.

His first convictions came in 2021: one for assaulting a woman at a party in Camden in 2018, putting his hands into her underwear and touching her vagina; another for sexual assault by penetration of a woman on her way to the Notting Hill carnival, having penetrated her with his fingers.

He was in prison first from 2021-23, during which time he sexually assaulted a female prison officer at HMP Brixton. Searches of his electronic devices showed him writing about his attraction to her.

After his release, he carried out his first attack on a train in October 2023, for which he was only identified later.

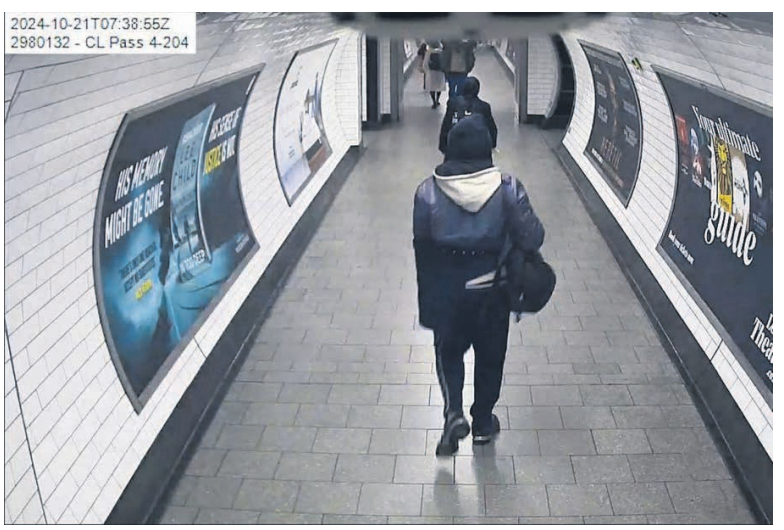
In 2024, he allegedly raped a woman in Tottenham. He was recalled to prison to complete the sentence he received in 2021, but not charged over the rape allegation, which is under renewed investigation.

Released from prison later in 2024, he then intensified his attacks on London's transport network, groping and sexually assaulting women on trains, often by trying to force his fingers into their vagina.

In other offences, the court heard, Levy used "the hustle and bustle of busy, rush-hour trains as his cover". He would get close to women and conceal his hand with a jumper or coat before attacking.

DCS Peter Fulton, the head of crime for British Transport Police (BTP), said Levy's victims, who were mostly in their 20s, were attacked at random and on impulse.

Levy crisscrossed London, armed with a stolen travel card, in one case boarding a train just minutes from his home, at White Hart Lane rail station, to attack a woman. After women reported the offences to BTP, Levy was arrested, charged and bailed.



▲ *CCTV issued by British Transport Police of Simon Levy on London's tube network, which he would use to sexually assault women picked at random*

▲ *DCI Neil John speaking after the verdict. The Met have been repeatedly criticised for a perceived failure to protect women* PHOTOGRAPH:JAMES MANNING/PA

Decades of failing women

There were so many signs Levy was a danger, but how clear was it that his offending could turn murderous?

After the first killing, in March 2025, Levy was arrested within days. The cause of death was inconclusive and he was bailed.

Police feel aggrieved that efforts failed to have Levy remanded in custody in May and June 2025, after he had been charged with several train attacks and was a murder suspect.

Kevin Southworth, the deputy assistant commissioner who heads public protection for the Met, said: "I think on the basis that we put, and BTP put, this man before a court on two occasions and requested remand, I think the obvious conclusion is, had he been remanded at that time … he would have been in prison for a sufficient period that he couldn't have then gone on to commit a murder."

Experts in tackling male sexual violence see similarities between Levy's case and that of Wayne Couzens, the Met officer who kidnapped, raped and murdered Sarah Everard in 2021. Previous, lower-level offending by Couzens, such as exposing himself to women, had been inadequately investigated by police.

Harriet Wistrich, the head of the Centre for Women's Justice, said the Levy case showed "a very clear pattern of escalating offending, from sexual assaults of women on public transport to rape and murder … perpetrators can become emboldened and move on to even more dangerous offending."

Wistrich added: "The failure of the criminal justice system to tackle his offending must have given him the message that it was easy to get away with it."

Southworth said he accepted that crucial questions needed to be answered: "What did our officers know? And what should they have done, if they didn't do it? I think one of the points of reflection … for the senior leadership of the Met is how do we, as a collective system, reflect on what went wrong here?"

The Independent Office for Police Conduct is investigating the handling of the case.

The revelations follow scandal after scandal over decades about how the criminal justice system fails women.

Wistrich said: "The scale and variety of failings [in this case] is shocking – in particular because, had they been dealt with appropriately, two women need not have lost their lives. It is particularly concerning that this has happened within five years of the horrendous revelations around Met police officers Wayne Couzens and David Carrick, and the Baroness Casey report into the Met [which found police to be institutionally racist, misogynistic and homophobic]. This type of scandal tells us little, if anything, has improved in practice."

England striker Toney charged over Soho nightclub 'assault'

Kevin Rawlinson

The England footballer Ivan Toney has been charged with assault after an incident at a nightclub in central London in December last year.

Scotland Yard said the striker had been charged on 31 July with assault causing actual bodily harm. Toney, who plays for the Saudi club Al-Ahli, will appear at Westminster magistrates court on 24 September.

The Sun newspaper reported in December that Toney had been arrested after an alleged headbutt. The paper said a fan had recognised the footballer and grabbed at him as he sought a photograph together prior to the incident.

The Metropolitan police said yesterday the charges related to an incident on 6 December last year at a nightclub on Wardour Street, Soho, reportedly the now-closed 100 Wardour Street.

A spokesperson for the footballer said: "Ivan acknowledges the charge and although he is naturally shocked, he looks forward to being given the opportunity to clear his name in court."

▲ *Toney has 10 England caps and plays for the Saudi club Al-Ahli*

Toney, who was a striker for Brentford, was at the centre of one of the most curious transfers on deadline day in August 2024 when he completed a late move to Al-Ahli worth a reported £40m.

He has also played for Newcastle United and his hometown club, Northampton Town.

Toney has played 10 times for England and was picked in their 2026 World Cup squad, making appearances against Argentina in the semi-final and in the win over France as England finished third.

Two thirds of England's NHS trusts prepare to cut mental health care

Continued *from page 1*

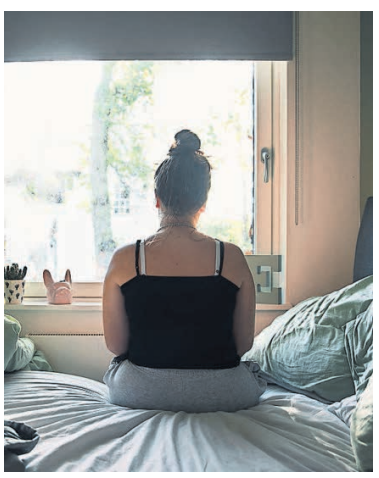
professionals at other trusts told the Guardian similar plans were being drawn up where they work. They fear the cuts will strip back services so much that they will not be able to properly perform their duties or guarantee safe care in their areas.

"This is not an isolated example in East London," said an NHS consultant psychiatrist, speaking on condition of anonymity. "Many mental health trusts are in a similar, if not worse, situation and are responding in similar ways through cutting jobs and compromising service delivery."

A mental health service manager at a third NHS mental health trust said: "Many mental health trusts are in a similar position. They have faced declining funding for the last couple of years alongside cost reduction targets."

Alex Stewart, assistant director of the NHS Alliance's mental health network, said: "Mental health services are coming under extraordinary pressure as a result of rapidly rising demand for care and very tough financial conditions.

"We see many examples of innovation and great care which give real grounds for hope. But it's increasingly evident the trade-offs and difficult decisions over jobs and services that we warned about are making their mark. Mental health leaders face particular pressures when finances are tight because a higher proportion of their expenditure goes on staff."



▲ *Mental health services are already having to cope with rising demand*

The NHS Alliance survey, conducted in March ahead of the new financial year, revealed widespread concerns about the need to make record efficiency savings in 2026-27.

There were also concerns among the 37 NHS mental health providers responding to the poll that the focus on balancing the books would impede progress on delivering more care outside hospitals and increasing preventive mental health care.

One NHS mental health trust leader told the survey there was "no investment for mental health community services" and their teams were "under-resourced" to manage the rise in demand.

"We welcome recent announcements on capital funding for community mental health centres and the confirmation of targets to improve access to mental health care," said Stewart. "But in the face of rising demand, the share of national NHS spend on mental health is expected to reduce for the third year in a row. It is essential mental health investment is not allowed to fall behind."

Tom Pollard, head of policy, public affairs and campaigns at Mind, said the results of the survey showed "the huge uphill battle we face" to save mental health services in England and ensure everyone could access high-quality care.

"The government set out a welcome ambition to move towards a more open access model of support … But if funding for staff and services is being cut, meaningful improvements will be impossible.

"In its upcoming mental health strategy, the government must set out how it will ensure services are adequately resourced and staffed to meet rising demand."

Sharon Graham, general secretary of the trade union Unite, said: "We cannot balance the books on the backs of the most vulnerable in society and by underfunding mental health provision you simply kick the can down the road and it costs more in the long term. Our members are outraged at attempts to cut jobs and services and will be fighting back with the full support of their union."

The Department of Health and Social Care was approached for comment.

Edinburgh fringe rejects petition to cancel Amanda Knox's sold out comedy show

Caroline Davies
Nadia Khomami

The Edinburgh festival fringe said it was "not afraid of controversy" after calls to cancel a sold-out show by Amanda Knox, the US woman who was falsely imprisoned for the 2007 murder of her British flatmate Meredith Kercher in Italy.

Knox's comedy show, Cartwheel, has been condemned by Kercher's family, with her sister, Stephanie, saying it "normalises and trivialises violence against women". A petition calling for it to be cancelled has been signed by more than 6,000 people.

Knox, from Seattle, and her then boyfriend, the Italian Raffaele Sollecito, were convicted in 2009 for the murder and sexual assault of Kercher, a foreign exchange student living in Perugia. The couple maintained their innocence and after years of legal battles were acquitted by Italy's highest court in 2015.

In a post on Instagram, Knox said: "Cartwheel is a show about motherhood, raising a daughter in a world that is unfair and dangerous for women, and what it costs to be the kind of mother who tells her the truth about that. Neither the author of this petition nor anyone who signed it has seen Cartwheel."

Knox said the petition contained "many false assumptions and completely mischaracterises the show". She added: "Cartwheel honours Meredith Kercher's memory and calls out the violence that was done to her and to me." Knox previously said the show did not "joke about Meredith's death". The title Cartwheel is a reference to a story that alleged Knox did cartwheels in the police station after Kercher's death.

▲ *Knox's show Cartwheel is sold out*

Tony Lankester, the director of the Fringe Society, told BBC Radio Scotland: "We're not afraid of controversy. The decision as to whether or not [the show] goes ahead lies with herself and it lies with the venue."

He added: "As sympathetic as we are to individual cases that crop up, and absolutely as a parent I can relate to the pain that they describe, but that can't be a criteria, it can't be one of the lenses that we look through."

The show's venue, Gilded Balloon Teviot, said in a statement: "The Edinburgh festival fringe is an open-access festival. As a fringe venue, we provide a platform for a wide range of voices, in line with the fringe's longstanding commitment to freedom of expression (within the confines of the law) … Amanda's show is a one-woman piece exploring themes of motherhood, presented independently by her."

Stephanie Kercher told BBC Breakfast that Knox was "naturally free to continue with her life as she wishes, but I think the problem with this particular project is that it is comedy. And whilst I appreciate comedy is there to push the boundaries … it very much normalises and trivialises violence against women and Meredith in particular."

Rudy Guede was convicted of Kercher's murder in 2008. He was released in 2021.

Claire Cochrane, a professor emeritus of theatre studies at the University of Worcester, said: "What happened to both Meredith Kercher and Amanda Knox was dreadful … but vociferous campaigns based on unexamined assumptions about content and motivation undermine genuine attempts to deal with personal legacies of violence and tragedy."

▶ *Demeter and Bombalurina are feline the dance while Old Gumbie Cat, top, takes it easy*

PHOTOGRAPHS: MARK SENIOR

Stage review A Jellicle jumble as Cats revival leans heavily on dance

Cats
Regent's Park Open Air theatre, London
★★★☆☆

Arifa Akbar

Andrew Lloyd Webber's cats are back and they could not inhabit a more feline-friendly space than this lush green corner of Regent's Park. The trees swish around their nocturnal prowls and the brilliant moon on the steel crescent set shines down on their song and dance. The big cats up the road in London zoo would surely approve.

Up to a point. These animals, directed and newly choreographed by Drew McOnie, are more balletic and graceful than those in the 1981 original, and the production reclaims the musical's reputation from Tom Hooper's film, which many found to be a dog's dinner.

Sami Fendall's set glimmers and glitters while her costumes rise from earthy colours to flamboyant leotard and catsuit get-ups. This perky crew don't just sit and sit like the Old Gumbie Cat, they dance and dance and dance through the flimsy and patchwork story of Jellicle cats convening for an annual ball in which one will be reborn for another chance at life.

Using TS Eliot's playful 1939 collection Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats as its lyrical basis, Lloyd Webber's musical is only slightly less strange in concept than his singing train engines in Starlight Express. As with the poems, the musical is constructed as an introduction to each cat contender in a series of vignettes, which here resemble an elegant feline variety show at times, an old-school film fantasia at others.

That is partly the problem: it is a hodgepodge in style, although always very stylish. The musical's sung-through nature does not lend itself to cohesive storytelling and the balance here is tipped too much in one direction so it seems like Cats: The Dance, with extended choreographed sequences and circus-like acrobatics. It results in some lovely expressive scenes but makes the structure disjointed.

▲ *Gary Wilmot plays nostalgic Gus*

Some of the cats are more characterful than others: Old Deuteronomy (Melanie La Barrie) plods around a little generically, Macavity (Dianté Lodge) is sufficiently mysterious, the criminal duo Mungojerrie (Danny Nattrass) and Rumpleteazer (Briana Craig) come as a classic variety hall double act. The highlight, without doubt, is Rum Tum Tugger with his eponymous song, which Jaydon Vijn sings with the hip-thrusting swagger of a young Mick Jagger, David Bowie and an alley cat on heat, rolled into one. Vijn brings such a lot of (c)attitude and personality that you wish the others could be more Rum Tum.

Gumbie Cat (Charlotte Riby) is endearing when her eponymous number comes up, but Gary Wilmot's comic chops seem redundant for his turn as the old, nostalgic theatrical cat, Gus (why not cast him in a more playful role?). Mr Mistoffelees (Jet Yau) also comes on to showcase some street dance, spinning on his head.

Taziva-Faye Katsande, an understudy stepping in as Grizabella, builds to a storming final rendition of Memory, the signature song of the show. Her vocal abilities are faultless but her characterisation is less polished and you are left wondering who Grizabella is, exactly, and what has got her back up.

By the end, you well and truly know how to address these cats but you would also quite like them to curl up and take a nap now.

Until 19 September, then touring

Tory plans to ban foreign nationals from all social housing condemned as 'divisive'

Caroline Davies

Plans to ban foreign nationals from social housing under a Conservative government have been condemned as "divisive".

Under proposals announced yesterday, the party said about 230,000 homes would become available if foreign nationals were prevented from accessing social housing.

Ending new tenancies for foreigners, as well as current tenancies for couples where neither is a UK, Irish or EU citizen with settled status, would free up an estimated 228,144 homes for British families, the party said.

Under the plans, tenants in England who do not qualify for the housing would be expected to move out of their homes within six months.

Foreign nationals with settled status, refugee status or specific humanitarian protections currently qualify for social housing.

Asylum seekers are not eligible for social housing, unless in exceptional circumstances such as domestic abuse cases.

Labour described the plans as "an unserious, unworkable proposal, copied from Reform, that does nothing to tackle the housing crisis the Tories themselves created".

Sarah Elliott, the chief executive of the housing charity Shelter, said: "These divisive plans would brutally kick people out of their homes, including thousands of families and pensioners who have lived in them for decades. And let's not forget that social tenants pay rent, which goes back to the public purse and into society.

"It is completely senseless to ruin people's lives, drive up homelessness and put extreme pressure on councils. This policy does nothing to deliver new social homes, which is what we desperately need."

The Royal College of Nursing said: "The worst thing in the world would be to cause serious housing worry for a workforce that keeps our services running, posing serious risk to patient care. Those advocating for them need to offer reassurances – and quickly – or explain why it is just that some of our most brilliant nursing staff may face housing insecurity."

Under the plans, any single person currently living in social housing who is not a British, Irish or EU citizen would lose their home. This includes those with children. Anyone with EU settled status would not be evicted.

For future tenancies, UK nationals and those with EU settled status would be eligible, but any new EU citizens without settled status would not be.

Couples, where neither of them is a UK or EU citizen and where they do not have EU settled status, will lose their entitlement.

Helen Whately, the Conservative shadow work and pensions secretary, said: "Making Britain your home should be earned by working, paying tax and integrating. It should not come with a free ride on the benefits system. Britain cannot be a cash machine for the world.

"Labour has lost control of immigration and lost control of the welfare bill, and it is British families picking up the bill and sitting on waiting lists. The next Conservative government will make foreign nationals ineligible for social housing. Nearly 230,000 homes could go to British families."

In 2024-25, 88.5% of main householders – the person in whose name the social home is rented – were UK or Irish nationals and 11.5% were non-UK/Irish nationals, according to the English Housing Survey.

There are an estimated 470,000 non-UK and non-Irish citizens living in social housing.

'It's mob rule' Asylum plan concerns turn to unrest in Norfolk town

Ben Quinn
Political Correspondent

A smashed window pane and some broken egg shells on a footpath were some of the tell-tale signs of the events this week on a residential street at the edge of Thetford.

On Friday afternoon it was not hard to find local people with a sense of foreboding after the latest disorder in the Norfolk market town, which has seen crowds attempt to storm properties believed to be housing asylum seekers.

Jenny Hollis, a former councillor pointed out the proximity of a local school and nursery to a house – now seemingly vacant – on Clover Way. She said: "The main concern is safety, the proximity of children and that people just have not been consulted about this.

"Thetford is a small town where people know each other, but if you are putting young men who people know nothing about into an area, sometimes in the dark of night, then it will be a cause of concern."

For three nights Thetford has been the scene of protests and disorder, with police officers subjected to violence, windows smashed, fences broken and people attempting to break into a residential property, police said.

However, after unrest which the local MP said had "put Thetford back decades", there was also deep unease among local people and others about the prospect of racism poisoning local relations, fuelled by disinformation and the far right seeking to exploit tensions.

Around the corner from where the latest unrest took place, a woman who was originally from eastern Europe quietly told the Guardian: "I have lived here for more than a decade and have come to call it home. The people are lovely, but last week was the first time that my partner was shouted at by someone who derided him as a 'migrant'."

▲ *Police making arrests after a third night of protests in Thetford, Norfolk*

Amid chants of "we want them out" from a crowd of up to 200 people on Clover Way on Wednesday night, a male police officer was hit by a brick and a female colleague was seriously bitten, according to Norfolk constabulary. The number of arrests in connection with disorder in different parts of the town had risen to six as of yesterday.

Asylum seekers had been removed from the properties on Thursday for their safety, according to the police, and there was no answer at a number of properties believed to have been used for that purpose when the Guardian visited.

"I have HMOs with asylum seekers in them on both sides of my house," said one local man, who said that they had tended to keep to themselves but he had concerns about tensions in the area and what it would do to property prices.

The three nights of disorder in the town also threaten to become the spark for the type of anti-immigration tensions that boiled over last year around a hotel outside the Essex town of Epping and spread elsewhere.

If the unrest in Thetford is different, however, it is because it is the first time that HMOs (houses in multiple occupation) have become the target of concerted and organised rage.

Terry Jermy, the Labour MP for South West Norfolk, has been critical of what he has described as a lack of engagement by the Home Office and has voiced unease that cheaper working-class areas have been chosen as the location to house asylum seekers.

"The lack of engagement both with the community and elected officials has been a huge concern, along with the apparent lack of a strategy, in terms of a cohesion plan but to close down rumours and the spread of misinformation," he said.

◀ *Sue and her son, Tommy, protest against plans to use RAF Barnham in Norfolk to house migrants* PHOTOGRAPH: CHRISTIAN SINIBALDI/THE GUARDIAN

"It seems to have been very badly handled. This is the sort of thing that can never be welcomed, but you can mitigate the worst and the whole situation is being mismanaged.

"I have been happy to acknowledge people's concerns and support peaceful protest but what we have seen over the last few days is outright criminality, mob rule and vigilante-style antics which go way beyond the rule of law. These people – and in many cases I'm talking about those who have travelled to Thetford – claim to be proud to be British but to be proud to be British is to support the rule of law."

The issue is also playing out at a party political level, with figures from Reform UK taking a prominent interest. Scott Hussey, a member of the cabinet on Reform-controlled Norfolk county council, was at the scene on Clover Way yesterday, telling the Guardian that residents and families were frustrated at seeing their town being turned into what he described as "a dumping ground for illegal immigrants".

Hussey added that his understanding from meeting with the Home Office was that more HMOs were due to be sited in the town, which he said would add to tensions over proposals to also use a nearby RAF base.

Anna Turley, minister of state for border security and asylum, told GB News that the disorder in Thetford on Thursday was "horrendous". She added that people had a right to protest, but said: "What we've seen is spilling over into violence, which is just not acceptable.

"Nobody should feel harassed, intimidated or threatened in their home, and certainly we shouldn't see our emergency workers and our police attacked in the way that we have seen."

Sweet, soft and photogenic: TikTok propels Japanese milk buns into supermarket success

From top: a fruit and milk bread ichigo sando; rainbow milk buns with powdered sugar; homemade milk bread

MAIN PHOTOGRAPH: ATMA RAHMANI/ SHUTTERSTOCK

Sarah Marsh
Consumer affairs correspondent

Golden-brown with a cloud-soft interior, Japanese milk buns have been propelled by TikTok fame to become the latest craze in Asian cuisine.

With clips racking up millions of views and thousands of comments and shares online, milk buns are having a moment as part of a growing interest in east Asian cuisine being reflected in UK supermarkets.

Waitrose says sales of Miso Tasty ramen paste are up 41% compared with last year, but it is the rise of milk bread (*shokupan*) that Emilie Wolfman, the world foods product developer at Waitrose, said is "one of the most exciting food trends we've seen cross over from social media into mainstream kitchens".

Searches for "Japanese milk buns" on Waitrose's website have risen by 617% over the past month, while sales are up 27% over the same period.

The lightly sweet, fine-crumbed yeast breads trace their roots to a bakery tradition introduced to Japan through western contact, but modern Japanese milk bread evolved during the 20th century as bakers adapted European techniques to local tastes.

They are far from the only Japanese food to find global fame on social media. Japan's deep-fried sandwiches have inspired queues round the block, while fluffy soufflé pancakes, delicate crepes and Japan's distinctive fruit sando – fresh fruit and cream layered between slices of soft milk bread – have all found devoted followings online and beyond.

As well as their viral success online, Wolfman attributes the growing popularity of milk buns to "London's cult burger restaurants and east Asian bakeries".

Black Bear Burger, the London-based burger chain, has built a loyal following by serving its smash burgers and crispy fried chicken in soft milk buns.

In London's Chinatown, Bun House showcases Cantonese-style baked milk buns with both savoury and sweet fillings.

Outside the capital, Tomás Gormley, the chef-patron of Edinburgh fine dining restaurant Cardinal, said it opened with milk buns on the menu.

"My first pastry chef, Mia, developed an incredible recipe that we still use today," he said. "We switch to sourdough every now and then to keep things interesting but always seem to end up back at the milk buns."

Gormley believes part of the appeal to chefs is how quickly and easily they can be produced.

He said: "I have all the time in the world for slow-fermented sourdoughs and overnight focaccias, but logistically a bread you can bash out in a couple of hours is a winner in the kitchen. It's also usually less butter-heavy than the French equivalent, brioche, which helps with costs, but also with balancing a menu and how much a guest can really eat over the course of a tasting menu, in my case."

Michael Booth, the author of Sushi and Beyond and The Meaning of Rice, said Japanese cuisine's "huge focus on presentation, aesthetics" and social media are a perfect match, with the country having been ahead of the curve for at least a decade.

"I can remember visiting a restaurant in Kyoto that was specifically tailored to presenting its food for social media," he added.

Booth said he became "totally obsessed" with milk buns and Japanese baked goods when he first visited Japan in the 1990s. "They had long ago mastered that super light crumb."

The MasterChef winner and restaurateur Tim Anderson notes the huge variety of milk breads available in Japan, ranging from mildly milky and sweet to those rich with eggs, butter, cream and honey that are more akin to brioche.

He said: "I think if British bakeries and supermarkets are trying to nail what makes milk bread special they should focus on the *yudane* [a traditional technique] and gluten development, which are what give milk bread its unique combination of strength and softness."

Anderson said he would recommend using milk bread to make *natto* toast, which features fermented soya beans beneath a layer of crisp melted cheese. If that doesn't appeal, he said, it works well for an egg sandwich, or "pizza toast is fantastic".

Summer of spritz sees a boom in Hugo elderflower cocktails

Zoe Wood

It's the summer of spritz, with British sales figures showing the Hugo elderflower cocktail snapping at the heels of the market-leader, Aperol, to be this year's favourite drink.

The number of Hugos ordered in bars nearly tripled in the three months to the end of June, while demand for the vibrant red Campari spritz surged 52%, with a limoncello version up 31%, according to the payments firm Square.

The Hugo "has absolutely blown up", said Steve Young, the business unit director for Bacardi in the UK and Ireland (the group's St-Germain liqueur is the Hugo's signature ingredient). He agreed that the Hugo spritz could be the drink of summer.

▲ *The Hugo is made with elderflower liqueur, prosecco, soda and mint*

Young said sales of St-Germain were growing faster in Britain than in any other country. "It has doubled in size over the last 12 months."

Created in Italy and very popular in France, the Hugo is sweeter than an Aperol spritz and is made with elderflower liqueur, prosecco, soda water and mint.

The spritz boom comes as Britons switch to refreshing, lower-alcohol drinks.

The phenomenon is driven by the rise of the "daycap", replacing the traditional nightcap with a longer, lighter-tasting drink in the late afternoon, particularly popular with millennials and gen Z.

Gen Z has put a rocket under the spritz business. For this 18-29 age group it is the No 1 cocktail despite ranking sixth overall in Bacardi's annual cocktail trends report.

Campari brands, which include Aperol and the non-alcoholic Crodino – were up more than 10% in the first six months of this year.

"Spritzes are having their moment," said Tom Oakton at the data company NielsenIQ. Sales were growing much faster than the UK alcohol market as a whole.

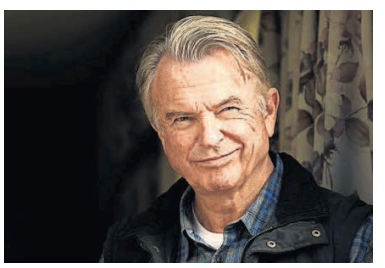
"Aperol remains the most popular, but St-Germain saw triple-digit growth from the rising popularity of the Hugo spritz," he said.

Aperol sales were up by 32.4% in the 12 weeks to 1 August, but St-Germain grew by 135.5%.

Sam Neill's final films include a mystery role in Zelda adaptation

Laurence Phelan

The actor Sam Neill completed filming a role in the forthcoming adaptation of The Legend of Zelda video game before he died, which will be one of his final on-screen appearances. According to a report in Deadline, Neill, who died of pneumonia last month aged 78, will appear in the live-action movie, which finished filming in April. Neill's role has not been revealed, but fans of the games have speculated he would be a good casting choice for the King of Hyrule, the fictional fantasy realm in which the Zelda games are primarily set.



▲ *Sam Neill died of pneumonia last month but his film legacy endures*

The New Zealand actor had also filmed parts in Godzilla x Kong: Supernova, scheduled for release in March 2027, and The Last Resort, a romcom in which he will play the father of the female lead, Daisy Ridley, also planned for release in 2027. The Legend of Zelda could be his final on-screen performance.

Neill had an extensive career but was especially loved for his horror and fantasy work, including Possession, Omen III, In the Mouth of Madness and the Jurassic Park trilogy.

The night Belfast burned

Inside story of how the riots unfolded

Hannah Al-Othman and Rory Carroll *Belfast*

Shortly after 10.30pm on Monday 8 June, as a summer twilight lingered over Belfast, a horrific scene unfolded on Kinnaird Avenue: a man straddled and repeatedly stabbed a figure lying on the ground in a bloody assault that ended only after onlookers intervened.

Others captured the drama on cameraphones and uploaded the footage to social media. Once seen, the grainy images were hard to forget, and by dawn on Tuesday 9 June they were ricocheting around X, WhatsApp, Facebook, Telegram and other platforms.

Many commentators highlighted one aspect: the assailant was black, the victim white. Police had a suspect in custody - he was initially identified as a refugee from Somalia, later corrected to Sudan - but this did not stem a cascade of outrage. What, commentators demanded to know, about other foreign men of "military age" in Northern Ireland? Had they been "vetted"? What "alien culture" had they imported?

By 9.30am a message was being widely shared. "All business to close at 5.30pm tonight. No excuses." It listed 25 locations around Northern Ireland for people to gather at 7pm. "Please forward [to] all men of the age of 18 and over. Wear dark clothing ... and be prepared to fight or be arrested." It was an invitation to a pogrom.

Far-right agitators, such as Elon Musk and Stephen Yaxley-Lennon, known as Tommy Robinson, amplified calls to protest, and those interventions were prominent in the coverage that followed.

But through interviews with witnesses and people who responded to the unrest, on-the-ground reporting in loyalist strongholds and at far-right rallies in Northern Ireland, and analysis of messages sent by figures connected to the extreme right, the Guardian has established the most complete picture yet of how a single incident of horrific violence precipitated the crisis. It suggests that organisers in Belfast needed no encouragement.

Drawing on previous violence - this was to be the third consecutive summer of racial disturbances in Northern Ireland - the organisers told people to leave phones at home and to deactivate dashcams and doorbell cameras.

By early afternoon, schools were sending children home, public transport was halting and steel shutters were closing over foreign-owned businesses.

As families sat down for dinner, crowds gathered at designated

▼ *Cars on fire in Belfast on 9 June, when rioters targeted migrants' homes after the arrest of a Sudanese knife-attack suspect* PHOTOGRAPH: PA

roundabouts and intersections in loyalist areas. At about 7.30pm a woman with a megaphone on the Shankill Road recited the Lord's Prayer to several hundred people, some draped in union flags. They marched through terraced sidestreets and halted outside the home of a Romanian family. A nearby black family, anticipating trouble, had already fled.

Dozens of boys and men wearing hoods and masks surged forward. Some launched bricks through windows, others shoved fireworks through the letterbox. A woman inside, visible to the crowd, watched helplessly as her home came under attack. The family's car went up in flames, then men in balaclavas broke down the door.

In contrast to race riots in England and Belfast in 2024, and in Ballymena last year, the violence was not recorded or streamed on phones. A teenage boy who ignored the organisers' injunction against filming was dragged aside and chastised.

Similar scenes played out across Belfast. In the east of the city, families from Ukraine, Romania, Poland and Sudan fled. Properties and vehicles were set ablaze.

Crowds lit bins and set up roadblocks to question and intimidate suspected foreigners. In Sandy Row, central Belfast, Ethiopian and Chinese residents fled and arsonists burned a Syrian supermarket. On Crumlin Road, in the west, Ugandan health workers and Nigerian families sought refuge. In some places the police were absent or stayed back and it was left to community volunteers to navigate the mobs and escort families to safety.

At about 10pm the violence abated and crowds began to disperse. Rain began to fall, helping emergency crews douse the embers of gutted homes and vehicles.

A toxic climate

The riot should not have come as a surprise. Northern Ireland was primed for it. "We could see it coming," said Daniel Holder, the director of the Committee on the Administration of Justice, a Belfast-based advocacy group. "It was an escalation of an existing pattern."

An escalation, and a learning curve. Drawing on lessons from 2024 and 2025, the agitators refined their methods to hit more targets and reduce the chances of arrest.

Far-right allies in England and the US were taking notes. Enrique Tarrio, the former head of the militant US group Proud Boys, visited and interviewed activists for a documentary. And last month, the Advance UK-affiliated YouTuber Sarah White was streaming multiple events in Northern Ireland, including an Orange Order march and an anti-migrant protest in Portrush.

The Northern Ireland "model" is not necessarily transferable. It has taken a unique mix – the legacy of the Troubles, xenophobia, social media and state acquiescence – to create the toxic climate.

Until the 1998 Good Friday agreement the region was almost entirely white and native-born. As sectarian violence eased, immigrants trickled in. By the 2021 census, 3.4% of the population was from a minority ethnic background. Many immigrants settled in working-class loyalist areas where the population was declining, property was cheaper – and paramilitary groups endured. Despite a state-sponsored "transitioning" process, the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) and Ulster Defence Association (UDA) split into sub-groups that continued to deal drugs and coercively control communities.

"Peace" walls between Catholic and Protestant neighbourhoods still stand, underlining the persistence of traditional sectarian divisions, but the waning IRA threat weakened loyalist paramilitaries' claims to be community defenders, prompting them to seek a new bogeyman to justify their existence.

"Loyalism has always been a reactionary ideology based on keeping out 'foreign' influence," said Stephen Millar, an academic and author of Performing Paramilitarism: Loyalist Songs, Conflict, and Culture War in Northern Ireland. "The pivot from [opposing] Irish nationalism to anti-migrant rhetoric is, to some extent, internally consistent, and serves to keep loyalism 'relevant', trading one form of racism for another."

Sporadic attacks and harassment against minority ethnic families have proliferated over the past decade. That turned out to be the warm-up for a full-scale riot in Belfast in August 2024 – a copycat response to mayhem in England after the killing of three girls in Southport. Then in June 2025, Ballymena, 25 miles outside Belfast, erupted after two Roma teenagers were charged with rape (the charges were later dropped).

June's eruption completed a grim summer hat-trick.

Jon Boutcher, the chief constable of the Police Service Northern Ireland (PSNI), said the overall picture of paramilitary involvement in the most recent trouble was "inconsistent" but that paramilitaries were present.

Many say the police have been slow to publicly recognise the role of paramilitary groups in controlling the violence. The UDA and UVF are fractured. Some factions urged restraint, but independent observers say other factions orchestrated much of the violence. Firefighters had no doubt about paramilitary influence and sought permission from their leaders before tackling blazes, sources said.

The ferrying of teenagers to and from flashpoints was further evidence of orchestration, said Chris Quinn, Northern Ireland's children's commissioner. "There's been a long history of child criminal coercion and child criminal exploitation." Such children should not escape legal consequences but they too were victims, said Quinn. Some had heeded the call to riot to service debts, including drug debts. Another source, a youth worker, said paramilitary groups had paid boys £100 to join the rioting.

Michaela Rafferty, of Anaka, a women's group that helped escort besieged families to safety, said that instead of Catholics, it was now people of colour being targeted by loyalist groups. "There has been a sectarian element, obviously, through our years of the Troubles and violence. Now that focus has kind of moved to brown and black people."

AI-generated anti-Islam murals have appeared in loyalist strongholds such as Moygashel and Newtownabbey. "Islam is Heathen, Islam is Satanic," says one. "A New Evil Has Arisen," says another.

Agitators have refined their methods. Most rioters in Ballymena last year wore masks or hoods but footage uploaded by participants and onlookers helped police identify and charge dozens of rioters. In Belfast, recent rioters banned filming and made greater efforts to conceal identifying details. Through trial and error they also discovered that without a galvanising incident, such as a brutal crime allegedly committed by a foreigner, calls for mass mobilisation tended to flop.

Instead, they set up online community groups and joined existing ones to drip-feed anti-foreigner sentiment, said Dessie Donnelly of rabble.coop, a Belfast-based tech cooperative that tracks online xenophobia. "Ballymena was a watershed. You had loads of groups springing up online and a far-right network emerging."

Before the most recent riot, posts about dark-skinned men in parks, and foreigners moving into houses of multiple occupation (HMOs) on particular streets, proliferated. The tactic distilled Islamophobia to a hyper-local level, said Donnelly. "It prepares people."

A researcher with Accountability Project Northern Ireland, which monitors online hate, said activists had formed online "clusters" that shared and amplified posts and infiltrated online forums for loyalist bonfires and marching bands. Last summer, the watchdog noticed that a Portadown-based Facebook group was circulating a screenshot of council-owned HMO properties – a hitlist rioters used in June.

In the year to 31 March, the PSNI recorded 2,367 race incidents and 1,507 race crimes, the highest on record. The burgeoning attacks created a sense of foreboding as summer approached, said Naomi Green, the Northern Ireland-based assistant secretary general of the Muslim Council of Britain. "We thought it was going to get quite scary very quickly, and it did."

A week before the riot, anti-racism organisations held an emergency meeting in Belfast, said Holder. The marching season loomed and there was "a huge buildup" of racist activism online and offline, he said. "For a third successive summer, it was waiting on an excuse."

The attack at Kinnaird Avenue provided the spark.

The troubling aftermath

The violence that night gave way to an eerie calm the next day. Central Belfast was like a ghost town. A familiar message began to circulate on social media. "All business to close … wear dark clothing."

In fact, Belfast remained largely quiet on the night of 10 June but in Glengormley, 7 miles north, a mob tried to march on the Chimney Corner hotel, which had been used to house asylum seekers, and fought against police in riot gear. The crowd hurled bricks and rocks, lit bonfires in the street and torched a vacant house. Police used water cannon and plastic bullets to drive them back.

About 11pm the violence dwindled then stopped. That was the last disturbance in June. But in some ways the aftermath has been just as troubling. In a poll by the thinktank More in Common, 8% of people in Northern Ireland said it was justified to burn migrants out of their homes and 11% agreed with intimidating them out of an area. Among respondents 41% said they sometimes felt like a stranger in their own country and three-quarters worried about asylum seekers entering Northern Ireland.

'Polls show a similar number of people in lots of societies think this violence against migrants is justified'

Conleth Burns
More In Common

Conleth Burns, the associate director and Ireland lead for More In Common, said polling in England showed similar results. "You've got a similar number of people in lots of societies who think that this level of violence against migrants is justified." Northern Ireland, however, had far fewer foreigners and people of colour than England, which showed even small numbers could have an outsized impact.

The Institute for Strategic Dialogue, which tracks extremism and misinformation, said the unrest turbo-charged far-right activism online. Posts promoting claims of anti-white police bias surged to more than 200,000 in the first two weeks of June compared with 104,000 in the whole of May, it said in a report this week.

The main parties at Stormont strongly condemned the violence but critics say the executive failed to prepare for the crisis. "They should have known something would happen," said Donnelly.

Even though the PSNI had struggled to contain unrest in previous years, police were still under-resourced, said Donnelly.

Holder said Stormont's response had downplayed the gravity of the crisis. "You'd expect a racist pogrom to be the key issue for the institutions to deal with over the summer, and putting in emergency measures to prevent that happening again. But no, there's no sense of urgency."

Liz Griffith, the head of migration justice at the Northern Ireland Law Centre, said the devolved government had failed to update anti-racism legislation and downgraded a long-awaited policy document. The strategy focused on "race relations", which Griffith said was "woefully out of date". "It's as if this was to do with somehow the relationships of people," Holder said. "That the people having the brick put through their window need to improve their relationship with those putting the brick through the window."

The Stormont executive had failed to bring forward hate crime and race equality laws in line with the rest of the UK. Griffith said: "It's been updated in England, Scotland and Wales, and ours is just antiquated. There's constant talk of consultation … but it has just got stuck, it's never moved."

In the face of this inaction, many want Andy Burnham to step in. Green said: "Unless Westminster intervenes at this point and ensures that there are protections and legal protections and consequences for some of this behaviour, unless there is some accountability here, it's going to continue."

▼ *The wildfire stopped just short of coastguard cottages on the Natural Trust's reserve at Dunwich Heath*

PHOTOGRAPH: JUSTIN MINNS/NATIONAL TRUST

Dunwich Heath wildfire

'The habitat birds relied on to nest and feed has just gone'

Patrick Barkham
Pippa Neill

A community pulling together, emergency services saving homes and caravan parks from catastrophe, and farmers and nature reserve wardens working together to create firebreaks to halt a firestorm 40-metres high – there was plenty to celebrate in the week when a swathe of east Suffolk burned.

But local residents were also in tears at the blackened, ruined state of more than 112 hectares of Dunwich Heath, mourning the devastation of a much-loved National Trust nature reserve alongside the neighbouring RSPB Minsmere. The rare birds that inhabit the reserve have lost crucial habitat, while the rare invertebrate species there will have been "decimated", according to the reserve's staff.

The fire took hold on 29 July and the cause is still unknown, but the Suffolk fire service said it burned at a "ferocious pace" due to hot weather, dry conditions and changing winds. On average 100 firefighters have been on scene since then, with crews from 18 fire services in attendance.

A week on, the above-ground fire has been subdued. The fire service has measured temperatures below ground exceeding 600C and surface temperatures of 60C. Hot winds and a lack of rain leaves the dry, sandy region in a state of high alert for further outbreaks, with many evacuated residents advised not to return to their homes. Local people and visitors have been kept away from a swathe of Dunwich Heath with the fire having exposed unexploded ordnance from the second world war.

The impact on wildlife has been vicious. RSPB Minsmere is home to some of the rarest bird species in the UK, including nightjars, nightingales and Dartford warblers. "The vegetation that is essential for supporting that bird life, the structure of the gorse and the trees, all appears to have gone," said Adam Rowlands, the Suffolk area manager for the RSPB. "So in essence, the habitat they would rely on to nest, to feed, to shelter and to roost at night has gone, so they won't have anywhere to return to."

An adviser for the fire service measured a 0% moisture content in the vegetation around the fire site. To Rowlands's knowledge, this is the only place in the UK where a 0% moisture content has been recorded in the vegetation before.

"In terms of climate change, it does appear to be a pretty unprecedented situation."

The site is also home to a wide range of rare invertebrates, including the narrow-mouthed whorl snail, antlions and green tiger beetles. Rowlands said a large proportion of these would have been "decimated" and even if they did survive, the loss of habitat means they now have nowhere to return to.

While the police investigation into the cause of the latest in a series of devastating global heating-exacerbated wildfires across Britain is continuing, the fires were still burning as the rightwing media and commentators began reporting that rewilding was to blame.

Conservationists rebutted the claim that rewilding – "leaving underbrush, fallen and overgrown vegetation alone", according to the Times columnist Libby Purves – had contributed to the fires.

"It's worth stressing this was not a rewilded landscape. This was a traditionally managed, classic 20th century conservation landscape," said Jonathan Spencer, a former head of environment for Forestry England and an influential expert on rewilding.

The fire occurred on the old areas of Dunwich Heath, an open and naturally dry mosaic of heather and gorse that has been managed in a similar way since the 1800s. The flames did not spread to areas of restored heathland.

According to the RSPB and the National Trust, on whose heathland the fire raged, the land is managed like most other lowland heaths, with regular cutting of scrub including heather and gorse to encourage young growth and keep areas warm and open for rare species such as adders and silver-studded blue butterflies. Bracken is removed and the area is traversed with firebreaks and a wet ditch that helped prevent the fire's spread.

The rewilding critique is "missing the point", according to Rowlands. "We don't have any land at Minsmere that would be defined as rewilding," he said. "We get criticised by the rewilders for being too interventionist."

He added: "That's not a criticism of rewilding. We need a variety of approaches in nature conservation, but it would be incorrect to say this incident was related to rewilding activity."

> ***'We're getting longer, hotter, dry spells. We have to face that climate change is a primary driver'***
>
> **Paul Forecast**
> *National Trust*

"The wild habitats themselves probably saved the fire from being much worse," said Paul Forecast, the regional director for the National Trust in the Midlands and east of England.

"We already had firebreaks built in, we removed dead material and having different age structures means you maintain more moisture in the ground," he said. "It's not the heath that's changed, it's the environment around it.

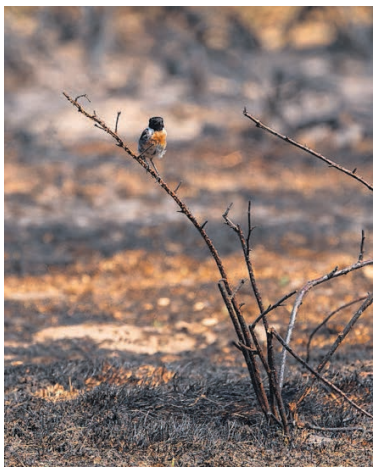
"We're getting much longer, hotter, dry spells. We're seeing fires on farmland. We're seeing fires on some of the most proactively managed land. We have to face that climate change is a primary driver of that."

Conservationists are optimistic that a more fire-resilient wildlife habitat can be created in fire-ravaged Suffolk, the Peak District and the Cairngorms.

Spencer is advising the National Trust and said habitat could be restored by rewilding. But he admitted there were no simple solutions on lowland heaths such as Dunwich. Clay-lined ponds, firebreaks and possibly even controlled burns in early spring as practised in the New Forest could help reduce fire risk, he said.

At the RSPB, Rowlands said the charity was always willing to learn and seek to adapt the recovering heathland to be more fire-resilient.

"Our charitable objectives are to benefit nature, benefit wildlife and encourage people to enjoy it, he said. "With this change in climate, we all need to learn all the time."



▲ *A stonechat surveys its blackened habitat after fire ravaged Dunwich Heath*

▼ *The wetlands of nearby RSPB Minsmere reserve is known for its pied avocets*

Hanky panky
A bandana on the head is this summer's hot accessory

Ellie Violet Bramley

▶ *Top bandanas ... the singer-songwriter Gracie Abrams performing at Glastonbury last summer. Below, Copenhagen fashion week attendees sporting the look this week*

PHOTOGRAPHS: SAMIR HUSSEIN/ WIREIMAGE; RAIMONDA KULIKAUSKIENE/ GETTY IMAGES

Baseball caps have been keeping the heads of fashion folk covered and shaded for the last few years. But there's a new accessory to be seen everywhere this summer: the bandana.

They were as common as cinnamon buns at Copenhagen fashion week this week. They have also recently been worn by Dua Lipa to the beach, Zendaya to shop for books and Priyanka Chopra Jonas to watch the tennis at Wimbledon.

Toast offers them blockprinted by artisans in India; they come in broderie anglaise at Asos, and embroidered at Next. The pop star Gracie Abrams, who wore one last summer to play Glastonbury, has since released bandanas as part of her merchandise.

On the secondhand site Depop, which offers bandanas in gingham, with skull and crossbones or crocheted, searches have gone up 152% in the past three months. Social media is rich in tutorials on how to style them on days when your hair is awaiting a wash, or how to use an elastic headband to keep slippy silk styles in place.

Grazia's fashion commerce editor, Daisy Murray, "started wearing bandanas last summer as a little Jackie O homage. They offer a little vintage - 60s/70s and 90s - feel to every look," she says, adding how practical they are. "I live in Brighton and have two small children, so it's a great way to manage curly hair on a windy beach."

Bella Webb, sustainability editor at Vogue Business, has been wearing one to shows in Copenhagen: "I love multi-functional items that can make my outfits feel fresh and playful without buying something new."

The history goes back far further than Felicity Kendal in a pair of dungarees. Invented in India - the Sanskrit word *bandh* means "to tie" - according to the Smithsonian magazine "textile makers employed a millennium-old tie-dyeing technique called *bandhani* to create colourful silk and cotton kerchiefs covered in lively patterns".

From south Asia they were imported to England by the Dutch and English East India Companies, where snuff-takers, who left unsightly tobacco stains on their plain hankies, apparently "embraced them to make their habit more discreet".Paisley, a pattern named after the Scottish town that originated in Kashmir, is the classic bandana pattern.

▲ *The wartime poster featuring factory worker Rosie the Riveter*

With a rich and global lineage, bandanas can signal drastically different things. Throughout history they have been associated with cowboys and thieves, and have also been a symbol of gang affiliation and of workers' rights.

They have been worn by hip-hop stars such as Tupac Shakur, and by Rosie the Riveter, who professed on wartime women's behalf: "We can do it!". In 2003, Missy Elliott matched a pink one with her velour tracksuit to accept a Grammy. Carrie Bradshaw wore them with abandon in Sex and the City.

Bridget Dalton, a semiotician and cultural analyst, says: "There is a subtext around race when it comes to headscarves. Black communities have long worn them; obviously hijabi people cover their heads, as do [married women in] Haredi communities." For many, they serve a specific purpose: "For Black people with natural hair, they protect them, they cover them, they keep [their hair] protected at night. For people with religious beliefs, they're part of their spiritual life. And for people who wear them for work then, they're to keep their hair clean and safe."

All of these meanings are loaded on to a simple square of fabric. But for many, Dalton adds, "bandanas are also mad-glamorous".

Cut! Why glossy talons are out and 'naked' healthy nails are in

Chloe Mac Donnell

▲ *The rising cost of manis and pedis has also driven the natural trend*

Trends at Copenhagen fashion week are usually easy to spot. The so-called fifth fashion week, a laid-back sibling to the four main fashion cities, has popularised everything from wearing romantic floaty dresses with practical trainers to giant hair scrunchies. But during its latest iteration, which wrapped up yesterday, a more subtle trend emerged: naked nails.

From the models on the catwalks to show-goers and locals, fingers and toes featured short, unvarnished nails. The trend is a shift away from the long, bright and glossy manis and pedis that have more recently dominated beauty standards.

Saffron Goddard, a manicurist who works with fashion brands including Burberry and Mango, says the goal is now "healthy-looking, well groomed nails rather than a noticeable manicure".

Isabella Rose Davey, in charge of operations for Copenhagen fashion week, describes the minimalist look as "very Danish". Davey, who quit her monthly mani/pedi habit when she moved to the city from London seven years ago, compares it to the Danish preference for "no-makeup makeup" where the focus is on healthy skin and minimal cosmetics.

"You never see anyone with a smokey eye or red lip here," Davey says. "They take the same approach to nails. Everything is about function here. We keep our nails short and simple because we are riding our bikes or swimming or in a sauna."

It is a trend that extends beyond the Danish capital. Some claim it is a recession indicator. With the average cost of manicure in the UK ranging from £15 to £55, it is harder to justify monthly appointments.

Often, the Danish nail isn't actually naked. Instead it often features a polish that is clear, sheer or a barely-there pink.

It's a look that Ruby Redstone, a fashion historian and owner of the New York fashion store Mess, has spotted in the city known as nail capital and where "no one can resist a mani/pedi". For Redstone, who recently swapped lime-green nails for "naked", it comes down to style. "I wear relatively crazy pieces and lots of bright colours and I have realised a neutral nail is a bit easier as it goes with everything."

Annabelle Taurua, a beauty expert for the booking platform Fresha, says the "no-mani mani look reflects a wider shift towards enhancing or embracing natural features". She points to lash-lift treatments that give the appearance of a curled natural lash rather than dramatic extensions. "Consumers are increasingly opting for healthy-looking, low-maintenance beauty," Taurua says.

Some cite environmental concerns as a driving factor, with every step of a manicure contributing to waste, including single-use gloves and nail files. Both resin gel nails, where a liquid polish is cured under a UV light, and acrylic, where a paste is bonded to the natural nail, are non-biodegradable and shed microplastics. A study in 2022 found that nail salons have some of the worst indoor microplastic air pollution. Add to the mix worries over exposure to UV light and allergic reactions and it's not surprising that services such as medical mani/pedis, where the focus is on nail health, are becoming more popular.

EMERGENCY SURGERY

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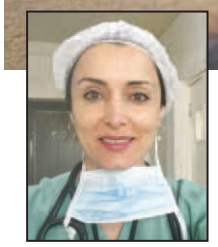
A man carries a wounded child into the MSF-run clinic at Rafah Indonesian Field Hospital in southern Gaza. Photograph © MSF



DR BIRSEN GASKELL IS AN ANAESTHETIST WHO WORKED IN GAZA.

"We arrived in Gaza and were immediately confronted by huge numbers of people crammed into the streets. You could hear the bombing and see the fear in people's faces.

We immediately got to work at the hospital. We treated a large number of patients for burns and trauma injuries, mostly people who'd been injured in explosions. There were a lot of children. I'd never seen so many burns patients in one place.

Some children were malnourished, and it was clear many were not eating properly. With post-operative care, it's vital that patients have a good diet to assist with tissue healing, but due to food shortages that just wasn't happening.

We were seeing around 180 patients every day. We didn't have the capacity to take everybody into the operating theatres – some procedures had to be carried out on the ward.

As an anaesthetist, one of my roles was to improve pain management. Due to shortages of medical supplies, there have been a lot of incidents during this conflict when people have been operated on without anaesthetics. It's inconceivable that this has happened, but it has.

Some patients stick in your mind. There was a nine-year-old girl who'd been injured when her home was bombed and lost part of her jaw. She and her mother were the only survivors from their family. I changed her dressing every few days and gave her antibiotic treatment. One day, she gave me a hug and asked if she'd ever look normal. I didn't have an answer for her. Reconstructive surgery would really help her, but nothing like that is on offer in Gaza.

The situation in Gaza is getting worse and people's medical needs are growing. The fact that there are people there who have had to undergo medical procedures without anaesthesia is barbaric. It's an inhumane situation.

Yet, despite the carnage and the horror, the MSF hospital was an oasis of calm. I was so impressed by the Gazan staff, by their resilience. Many had lost family members and were living in tents, but they were still there every day, helping people.

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MSFR0048

Is the Bond effect real?

Why MI6 has the respect of the world's spy agencies

Great PR? Roger Moore as James Bond

The MI6 headquarters in Vauxhall, south London and, above, the KGB double agent Oleg Gordievsky, a cold war asset recruited by MI6

PHOTOGRAPH: SPOTMATIK/GETTY

Dan Sabbagh
Defence and security editor

MI6 has the swagger of James Bond; its French equivalent, DGSE, the complexities of the TV drama Le Bureau. The film and TV shows may be fictional, but a survey run by a French magazine that placed the British spy agency above the French as No 1 across all of Europe this week is emphatically not.

L'Express, a news weekly, conducted a Eurovision-style poll of 60 current and former spies from across the continent, plus the CIA and Israel's Mossad. Each was asked to rank their top five foreign intelligence agencies – in secret, naturally. MI6 was first with 251 points ahead of DGSE on 169 and other agencies trailing behind.

The result did not surprise Alexandra Saviana, a deputy editor at L'Express, specialising in defence and intelligence, but the margin of victory did. "It is a huge point gap," she said, reflecting the opinions of insiders and allies, 17 of whom are or were agency chiefs in an interconnected, covert ecosystem.

At MI6's headquarters in Vauxhall, London, there has been no sign of a public reaction from its chief, Blaise Metreweli. But there is a quiet satisfaction at the unexpected verdict, not least because the agency values how it is perceived by both allies and adversaries. "Reputation matters a lot in the espionage game," said a former Whitehall insider.

"British spies fascinate Europe, and beyond," L'Express explained in its cover story. Saviana added that MI6's success in the poll was principally down to its record in recruiting and running high-level human sources over generations: a focus on human intelligence in an era dominated by technology, intercepts and satellite monitoring.

"The British have the ability to play the long game, to bet on sources over 10 years, a bit like the Russians," a former French DGSE spy told the magazine, adding that "they have a penchant for underhand tactics", without revealing what they meant.

One ex-spy voiced scepticism about the survey and added that a human intelligence service such as MI6 was only as good as the high value agents on its books. Under Richard Moore, MI6's previous chief, there were worries that it no longer had enough. Others, including Saviana, accept that greater credit might have been given to MI6's sister agency, the signals intelligence experts at GCHQ, but it was not in the poll.

MI6's reputation among its peers, the French publication said, was built on "long-standing tradition", including recruiting cold war assets, most notably the KGB's Oleg Gordievsky, a double agent in the late 1970s and early 1980s, who helped convince Margaret Thatcher to take Mikhail Gorbachev seriously. Gordievsky had to be dramatically smuggled into Finland in 1985, his cover finally blown.

Not every mole evaded capture. Alireza Akbari, a former Iranian deputy defence minister who had become a British citizen, was arrested on a return to Iran in 2019 and executed in 2023. He confessed to being an MI6 agent. Though the confessions appeared coerced, spies from a number of countries indicated he had been the source on the existence of the Fordow nuclear enrichment site in 2008.

In the run-up to the 2003 Iraq war, MI6 was accused of simplistically supporting the case for war, promoting what turned out to be false sources, claiming Iraq's leader Saddam Hussein could attack UK targets within "45 minutes" and having relied on one source who described supposed chemical weapons devices that were remarkably similar to one in the Hollywood movie The Rock.

L'Express argued that MI6 had rehabilitated itself in the run-up to the Ukraine war in February 2022. It was MI6 that correctly warned, in conjunction with the CIA, that Russia was about to invade, while its French and German counterparts were sceptical up until the last minute, having misjudged the situation.

It reflects MI6's close and longstanding relationship with the CIA, part of the wider Five Eyes arrangements for intelligence sharing between the US, UK, Australia, Canada and New Zealand, that are the envy of continental Europe, even allowing for the complexities posed by Donald Trump's chaotic presidency. "Every other country wants to say they are the sixth eye," Saviana said.

Gordon Corera, the co-presenter of The Rest is Classified podcast, recalled that a former MI6 chief once told him a story of a young officer going somewhere far flung, not knowing if the person he was trying to cultivate spoke English.

"As he walked into the room the contact extended his hand and said: 'Hello, Mr Bond.' The former chief remarked: 'I doubt if he would have received such a warm welcome if he'd been from the Belgian secret service.'"

Theatre review

Zingy comedy becomes satire about moral compromises

Target Audience
Pleasance Courtyard, Edinburgh
★★★★☆

Mark Fisher

'I've never read anything Greek, but I bet if feels exactly like this," says Isabelle (RhéAna Kamalu) at the apocalyptic height of this zingy comedy. She is a gen Z intern whose end-of-times neuroses have suddenly become justified after she receives a government alert to stay indoors.

The line has the characteristic wit of the playwright Dan Bishop, but the scene itself is unexpected. Wind back to the start of Target Audience and you will find something much more ephemeral.

It begins as a jolly send-up of a vacuous screen industry, one beholden to charismatic bullshitters such as Angie (James Coward) and the tyranny of audience data. We could be watching the BBC satire W1A or David Mamet's Speed-the-Plow as a production company brings in Tobias (Henry Calcutt), a politically sensitive writer, to see if he can add an edge to scripts in development.

One of these is called Citizen 54, the other Thorns. If it were not for the poster for Horizon, you could believe they had never made a film, preferring endless days of platitudes and statistics. With his sidekick Bruiser (Molly Windust), Angie flatters Tobias as quickly as he undermines him.

If the material is familiar, the actors make it seem fresh in Bishop's entertaining production. If he got rid of the scene changes, it would be more pacy still. But the playwright is playing the long game and what emerges from the airhead character comedy is a satire about moral compromises that affect not just the telly we watch but the late-capitalist power structures we inhabit.

Until 30 August

RhéAna Kamalu as Isabelle and Henry Calcutt as Tobias

Tory troubles Badenoch's 'weird week' leaves her party divided

Alexandra Topping
Jessica Elgot

There was a moment in the middle of this week when a news alert raised eyebrows among the politically committed: "Kemi Badenoch: Former neo-Nazi candidate would just be sorting out bins," it read.

It was a collection of words that would give the most sanguine of communications professionals palpitations, followed by panicked advice that retreat was necessary. But, as a deeply weird week for the Conservative party came to a close yesterday, its leader appeared determined to hold the line.

With Kemi Badenoch accused of aping Reform on policy and purging centrists from her party in recent weeks, her decision to stand by a man who was jailed after creating sexualised images of a Jewish MP and calling her a "rodent" has prompted concerns about the leader of the opposition's political antennae and the wider strategy of her party.

On Monday it emerged that a former neo-Nazi activist convicted of the sexist and antisemitic harassment of the Labour peer Luciana Berger had been selected as a Conservative candidate for a local election in Somerset.

About 48 hours later Joshua Bonehill-Paine – the creator of pro-right viral AI clips – withdrew his candidacy, saying Badenoch had asked him to become an adviser to the party's culture and integration commission, focusing on how young men become radicalised.

As pressure mounted, Badenoch said she was "sad" that Bonehill-Paine felt he "won't be given the space to explain his position and represent his community", chastising those who had called her judgment into question. "Piling on [people who have changed] and trying to get them cancelled may be sport for other parties," she wrote on social media. "But this is a different Conservative party."

Her stance has left some in her members delighted by her persistent pugilism, but others scratching their heads and looking to the door. For opponents, it has been a moment to savour, with Reform UK saying her support "beggars belief", while locally focused Liberal Democrats delighted in criticising Badenoch's insistence that as a councillor Bonehill-Paine would be only be "looking at parking, sorting out bins".

The embrace of Bonehill-Paine has come at a critical moment in Badenoch's leadership. Last month, she embarked on a purge of the Conservative parliamentary party, writing in the Telegraph that it was "not a retirement home for failed politicians" and demanding that anyone who supported net zero or Britain's membership of the European convention on human rights (ECHR) should be blocked from standing as a candidate at the next election.

The former Tory minister Gavin Barwell lost the whip, while the former cabinet member Grant Shapps was blocked from standing again for the party. Sources said many Reform party members had also been blocked from joining the party. "To do that while welcoming this chap has definitely raised a few eyebrows," said one. The purge had left many young Tories and centrists politically homeless, said the former Tory activist Cody Butler, who resigned last weekend as chair of the One Nation Conservative Network and left the party. Centrists, members worried about the climate crisis and conservation and remainers – those who Margaret Thatcher may have referred to as "wets" – were "running out of road", he said.

Butler added: "We keep hearing the parliamentary party has never been more united. But I think the real truth is the arsonists have taken control, and they're trying to set the great oak tree of Toryism alight."

This week Badenoch announced that Conservatives would evict foreign nationals with leave to remain from social housing, prompting Zia Yusuf to accuse her of "trying to copy Reform UK policy", and the homelessness charity Shelter to say the policy would "drive up homelessness and put extreme pressure on councils".

Despite the private worries of some, delight in Badenoch's unabashed tack right is not difficult to find among the Tory rank and file. "It's going down really well," said one MP. "The party thinks Kemi is doing brilliantly." A senior Conservative adviser said the party was being clear on what it believed and why. "At the last election voters would tell us they didn't know what the party stood for. Kemi is changing that," they said.

Labour sources said they had been looking on with popcorn this week. "Just as you think Kemi might finally be sorting out their tent, she spends a week focused on totally irrelevant nonsense," said one. "Nothing trumps a person's instincts and hers are just wrong."

Gleeful Liberal Democrats point out that under Badenoch the Tories seem to be showing little interest in taking back any of the 60 seats they directly lost to the Lib Dems in 2024, as part of a drubbing in which the Conservatives shed a record 251 seats.

There are zero Conservative MPs in Oxfordshire for the first time since 1777. A committed leftwing hiker could walk from Land's End to London without passing through a Tory constituency. Despite Badenoch's insistence that the May local elections showed that "the Conservatives are coming back", the party lost about 500 councillors in England and ceded control of three local authorities. Even now the Tories are skittering along their baseline of 19% of the vote.

One senior Lib Dem source said: "It was widely expected that the Conservatives were at their lowest ebb in 2024 and would quickly start making progress; in fact it's us that have taken loads off them rather than the other way round.

"Whether it is fighting for more action on the climate or defending human rights, the Conservatives sound more like Nigel Farage than former leaders who were popular with middle England. It is genuinely giving us the biggest opportunity against them we have ever had."

Given the polling – and the results of the 2024 election when the Conservatives lost about a third of their votes to Reform – attempting to woo those who voted for Farage was logical, said the pollster John Curtice.

"The Tories are in a pretty dire state, but not quite as dire as they were a few months ago," he said. "By my calculation they are now losing around 17% of those votes to Farage." Polling also indicates that Badenoch's personal approval ratings are on the up – YouGov last month put her net favourability at -11, the highest of any Conservative leader in more than five years.

But the Tories were now facing a dilemma, Curtice added: whether to try to build a more centrist coalition with the voters who had stuck with the party, or try to win Reform voters back. "But in [Reform] voters' minds they are the party who failed to deliver Brexit properly and who created the Boris wave," he said. "And the more fundamental problem is not to do with ideology, it's to do with competence. Partygate trashed their ethical reputation, and [Liz] Truss trashed their reputation on the economy."

Robert Hayward, a Conservative peer and polling analyst, played down the theory that Badenoch was increasingly moving the Conservatives to the right, but said she would have to adapt against a Labour party under Andy Burham.

Asked where it looked like the Conservatives would gain seats on their current trajectory, Hayward was candid.

"I don't think that is very clear as yet, and that's a major challenge to the party," he said. "But it's a problem for everyone. People's allegiance to any political party is weaker now than at any moment during my lifetime."

▲ *Kemi Badenoch went on a raid with Surrey police during a week when she tacked to the political right*
PHOTOGRAPH: JORDAN PETTITT/PA MEDIA

◀ *The former neo-Nazi Joshua Bonehill-Paine withdrew his candidacy to become a Tory councillor*

William Orbit, pop producer for Madonna and Blur, dies aged 69

Ben Beaumont-Thomas

William Orbit, the British music producer whose dreamy yet propulsive style invigorated work by Madonna, Blur, All Saints, U2 and more, has died aged 69.

A statement on his social media, attributed to family and friends, said he died at home on 23 July. "He will be greatly missed by us and by so many whose lives he touched through his music, friendship and kindness," the statement read. No cause of death was given.

Orbit was most famous for his collaboration with Madonna on her 1998 album Ray of Light. His strikingly original backings, rooted in trip-hop, jungle and techno, marked a new chapter for one of pop's greatest stars, resulting in hits such as Frozen, The Power of Goodbye and the giddy title track. It had multi-platinum sales across the world and won Madonna three Grammy awards.

His work also included Blur's exploratory, emotionally scarred album 13, All Saints' UK No 1 Pure Shores, Pink's hit Feel Good Time, and more. He released a raft of albums and singles under his own name; his electronic twist on Samuel Barber's Adagio for Strings, aided by a trance remix, reached the UK Top 5 in 1999.

Born William Wainwright in 1956 and raised in north London, the son of two teachers he described as "decidedly working class and poor", he left school at 16 and became what he described as a post-hippie, living in a squat, doing low-paid labour and, by his recollection, consuming "a Mars bar and an acid tab a day". In 1980 he formed the electronic/ambient trio Torch Song with Laurie Mayer and Grant Gilbert, releasing three albums between 1984 and 1987.

Well versed in electronic music production, he was hired to create the soundtrack to the Rob Lowe and Patrick Swayze film Youngblood, and remixes for pop artists – including Madonna. Wielding breakbeats and puckish instrumentation, he gave a chirpier cast to her early 90s singles Justify My Love and Erotica.

"William is a complete madman genius," Madonna said of the Ray of Light sessions. "I'd come to him with an idea of where I wanted to go musically, hum melodies or read lyrics, and then leave him alone in the laboratory. Sometimes he'd go in the direction I wanted and sometimes he'd swerve off somewhere else entirely." Earlier this year, Orbit said:

▲ *William Orbit was 'a madman genius', according to Madonna*

"I will always love that woman. For real. She made my career."

The late 90s were an industrious period. In 1999, he released Pieces in a Modern Style, an album of classical reworkings, and Blur's album 13 was released, on which Orbit crafted hit singles Tender and Coffee and TV.

Orbit was courted by a range of pop artists in the years that followed, including Britney Spears, Melanie C, Robbie Williams and Chris Brown.

◀ *Phoebe Bridgers releases her third album, Lost Weekend, on Friday*
PHOTOGRAPH: FRANK OCKENFELS

The songwriter to know

Why Phoebe Bridgers is the voice of the 2020s

Katie Hawthorne

On Friday, the indie star Phoebe Bridgers releases her long-awaited third album, six years since her pandemic-era breakthrough. Alongside a slew of glittering reviews for Lost Weekend, including five stars from the Guardian, with it comes her first solo charting single in the UK – although the Californian musician's influence runs far deeper than reviews or record sales could measure.

Just how did Phoebe Bridgers become the most influential songwriter of the 2020s?

Bridgers' idiosyncratic writing has shaped the sound of the decade. Her second album Punisher, released in June 2020 , spookily anticipated that strange, lonely year: in her eerie double-tracked vocals (a nod to Bridgers' musical hero, Elliott Smith), she sang of empty shopping malls and conspiracy theories over lush, unsettling music made from watery electric guitar, Mellotron, strings, screams and birdsong. Today, Bridgers' distinctive mix of dry wit and pathos is traceable in the lyrics of pop's new chart toppers, while heavyweights across generations and genres, including Paul McCartney, Taylor Swift and SZA, have clamoured for collaborations. "She *is* the reference now," Swift told the Guardian in 2022.

"She's the voice of a really particular moment," says the award-winning author Carmen Maria Machado. There is a kinship between Machado's prose and Bridgers' lyrics – both are candid, haunted, unafraid to get gruesome – and it resulted in Machado publishing a short story to accompany Punisher. "Phoebe's music is so precise and weird and beautiful; it's a prayer or an ode to this place that we're living in, while also watching it fall apart," says Machado.

Reviews for Lost Weekend have highlighted the album's deeply personal subject matter – it discusses the death of Bridgers' father, and the end of her engagement to the actor Paul Mescal – but also Bridgers' surreal sense of humour. When performing single Lost Boys on the Tonight Show, she played it first with a band of children, who were fizzing with excitement, and then again in an acoustic arrangement with the veteran folk musician Dan Reeder. The effect was trippy, sweet and faintly morbid: distinctly Bridgers.

▲ *Phoebe Bridgers at the Brixton Academy, south London, in 2022*

For Naomi McPherson, a member of the synth-pop three-piece Muna, it's this mixture of matter-of-fact and magical that makes Bridgers so distinct. McPherson pointed to a Lost Weekend song with a line about turning down the stereo volume to better parallel park: "To be able to put that in a song in a way that isn't stupid, but is actually brilliant and somehow deeply touching, is an enormous feat."

Muna signed to Bridgers' record label Saddest Factory in 2021, joining a cohort of imaginative, predominantly queer musicians united under Bridgers' mentality of "getting cool stuff out to people as fast as possible". The label was rolled into parent company Dead Oceans earlier this year after a trademark dispute, but its lasting influence reflects Bridgers' determination to change the music industry for the better.

Bridgers' plain-talking has won her a passionate fanbase, many of whom are easily spotted by their matching ghost tattoos – a reference to the cover of her 2017 debut Stranger in the Alps – and her concerts are intense: the singer-songwriter Claud, who has toured with Bridgers, describes "crowds of tens of thousands where you can actually hear a pin drop". It follows, then, that Bridgers decided to promote Lost Weekend with a series of secretive pop-up shows across the US.

Fan Baleigh Epperly, an environmental advocate, DJ and co-founder of the queer, female-led local DJ collective Their House, says they all sat cross-legged, watching Bridgers play. She predicts the performance will have a lasting impact on young musicians who may have internalised damaging stereotypes about Appalachia: "If Phoebe is good enough for West Virginia, then you're good enough to play here, to live here, to be from here."

Tailgaters beware

Operators fight back on fare dodging

Esther Addley

Gates at London's Victoria station. Fare-dodging has evolved as tickets go digital and operators cut staff
PHOTOGRAPH: ASHLEY COOPER PICS/ALAMY

There is more than one way to commit fraud, and for some rail travellers, it has been as simple as a double click on the side of their phone as their train approaches its destination.

That telltale last-minute purchase of a digital ticket – for the shortest journey that will allow them to bleep through the gates, regardless of how far they have travelled – is one of a number of illegal wheezes that train operators are now trying to eliminate, with the enthusiastic backing of the government department that will directly oversee most of England's rail services when they are renationalised next year.

Two rail companies, South Western (SWR) and GTR, which operates Thameslink, Southern and other services, this week introduced measures to clamp down on so-called "short-faring" – a trick by which passengers buy a last-minute digital ticket only for the final part of their journey, even if they boarded in a station without barriers much further away.

Don't bother, any longer, trying to download a digital ticket from Vauxhall to Waterloo, the terminus for many trains to London from the west, or on a number of other routes, apparently including from Norwood Junction to London Bridge, where many services from the south coast hit the capital. For those and some other routes, you will now need to collect a physical ticket from a real life ticket machine, after operators found that up to 95% of tickets on some short routes were being used fraudulently.

> ***'We're coming to terms with a different form of ticketing. It's clearly open to abuse'***
>
> **Christian Wolmar**
> *Transport commentator*

Fare evasion on Britain's railways did not begin with digitisation – you don't need a QR code to vault a barrier or hide in the toilet from a ticket inspector. But the increasing reliance on digital ticketing has widened some of the loopholes for those minded to cheat the system – and added to an ever growing problem for train companies.

Up to £400m is lost to fraud each year on the rail network according to the Department for Transport, through hi-tech and decidedly low-tech methods. As well as short-faring, operators point to "quick scanning" – buying a ticket on your phone seconds before being approached by an inspector; "tailgating" – squeezing behind a paying customer as they pass through a ticket gate; and "donutting", which describes a scam by which a passenger buys a cheap ticket covering the first part of their journey and another for the last, but avoids paying the higher cost of the full trip. A former senior executive at HSBC, Joseph Molloy, received a suspended sentence in February for using this technique 740 times to commute between Orpington in Kent and London Bridge, saving him £5,911 over 11 months.

"It's quite a big problem, because we're coming to terms with a completely different form of ticketing," said the railway commentator and author Christian Wolmar. "No longer do you go to the ticket office and buy little red and yellow cards; you now buy online, and that affords these new opportunities. The system is clearly open to abuse."

Although a push to reduce staff numbers has been a factor, he said: "How you tackle this is very difficult because you can't have guards at every stop. It's through digital analysis that they are going to find a solution to this."

The government appears to agree, widening the introduction this month of an app that calculates ticket fares by tracking the user's phone. Currently being trialled on routes in the East Midlands and Yorkshire, the technology could eventually be in use across Great British Railways, the public body that will take over the running of the soon to be renationalised network, expected to be up and running next year.

"Fare evasion is illegal and selfish – it actively makes journeys worse for all rail passengers by diverting money that could otherwise be used to improve services," said the transport secretary, Heidi Alexander. "We are committed to tackling ticket cheats, and that's one of the expected benefits of expanding our digital ticketing app to more people across the trial areas."

Her department has also recently given £33m for new or enhanced ticket gates at "fare dodger hot spots" across England.

SWR said its introduction of new anti-fraud measures came after one intervention at Brighton station found that half of those travelling on the wrong ticket were using the short-faring scam. To passengers disembarking at the station yesterday morning, a clampdown on cheats was very welcome. "Obviously fares go up anyway because of inflation, but they are probably pushing up our fares as well, so we all suffer," said Deanna Smith, who had travelled on Thameslink with her partner to visit a coffee festival. "It's just like tax dodging – we all fall victim to their behaviour."

"I'm someone who has always paid for everything, so I get a bit pissed off [by fare dodging]," said Nicola Garrett, who was on a day trip to Brighton with a friend from her home in Leigh-on-Sea. "Nobody seems to think that they have to pay for anything these days. It's just like, if you can get away with doing it, why wouldn't you?"

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▼ *Anthony Bourdain in 2005. The celebrity chef, TV presenter and author took his own life in 2018*

PHOTOGRAPH: JACKY GHOSSEIN/FAIRFAX/GETTY

‘He made food writing sexy’ As biopic hits screens, who was the real Anthony Bourdain?

David Smith
Washington bureau chief

The novelist Michael Cunningham has described Provincetown, on the tip of Cape Cod, as “one of the places in the world you can disappear into”.

This idiosyncratic bohemia attracted the likes of Edward Hopper and Tennessee Williams along with dropouts, drag queens and drifters. In the summer of 1975 came a lanky, restless 19-year-old from New Jersey with no job and no money, sleeping on the floor of a shared cottage. His name was Anthony Bourdain, and he would later become a celebrity chef, author and television globetrotter.

Half a century later, that coming of age has been mythologised by Hollywood. Matt Johnson’s new film, Tony, starring Dominic Sessa as the adolescent dishwasher, imagines the origin story of the man before he rewrote the rules of food writing with his 2000 memoir, Kitchen Confidential.

For those who knew Bourdain best, the film’s release – eight years after he took his own life – has been difficult. “I have a very strong emotional relationship to Tony and yeah, it’s hard,” says Joel Rose, 78, a novelist and editor who was arguably Bourdain’s closest literary confidant for 35 years.

“There’s a lot going on with Tony’s memory and the memories that I have, and how in so many ways I feel cheated and confused. I had a very different relationship with Tony than his TV persona.”

Provincetown in the 1970s was an unruly haven largely untouched by the mainstream – a town where the writer Norman Mailer and the artist Robert Motherwell could turn up at the same dancefloor, at a club called Piggy’s, as clam diggers and drifting college kids.

Bourdain later described those months in Kitchen Confidential: “We all went to the beaches and ponds each morning, smoked pot, sniffed a little coke, dropped acid and sunbathed nude, as well as indulging in other healthy teenage activities.”

That arrangement did not last. One night, according to the New York Times, a roommate came home from her shift at the Flagship furious because the dishwasher had failed to show up for work. She told Bourdain: “You know who our new dishwasher is? You!”

The next morning he put on an apron for the first time. Inside the Flagship’s kitchen – later fictionalised as the Dreadnaught in Kitchen Confidential – he discovered a structure he’d never known before: hierarchy and a kind of belonging. He worked his way up to the salad station and beyond.

He told the Observer in 2017: “I only became happy as a dishwasher, my first job. I was a shy, goofy, awkward teenager. But in this blue collar, factory-like environment, there was no blurred line, no grey area, no philosophical question to fret over.”

It was also that summer at the Flagship that Bourdain saw the moment he would later credit with making him want to become a chef. The kitchen crew crowded around a window overlooking the rubbish bins to watch their chef mid sexual encounter with a customer who was still in her wedding dress. The kitchen staff, Bourdain decided, were like pirates, answerable to nobody, living by their own rules.

As the industry later reckoned with its long history of physical and sexual abuse, Bourdain said he regretted having glamorised a culture that was, underneath the swagger, often exploitative. He also grew more clear-eyed about the drug use that hollowed out so many of the kitchens he had worked in.

Bourdain came back to Provincetown the next spring, ending up at Ciro’s, an Italian restaurant. Alexej Getmanov, one of the Ciro’s cooks, told the New York Times last week: “We looked at him and sneered, because he seemed very callow and, on the one hand, full of himself and, on the other hand, unsure.”

The humiliation of being bumped back down to salads stung Bourdain, prompting him to enrol at the Culinary Institute of America in 1977 in an effort to prove himself. If Provincetown was where Bourdain discovered the kitchen, it was the grimy streets of New York’s East Village in the early 1980s that forged him as a writer. “He was a good writer right from the start,” said Rose. “He was a natural.”

Bourdain was still living on the margins, balancing intense double shifts in kitchens with a heavy drug habit. Rose said that when he first met Bourdain, who had come to his flat to introduce himself, “he had just gotten high and I called him on it right away because I knew. I’ve been there myself.”

In the late 1990s, Bourdain was in a Tokyo hotel room, looking out over the city after a visit to the fish market, when he sent a long, vivid email to Rose, who was living with Karen Rinaldi, an editor at Bloomsbury. “I came in with this email and I said to Karen: ‘I got to read you this.’ She said: ‘Does Tony have any other stories?’ I said: ‘Are you kidding me? He has so many!’”

Rinaldi bought the book. When it was published in 2000, Kitchen Confidential shattered the genteel, recipe-driven world of food publishing, ushering in an era that would lead to TV dramas such as The Bear.

Dianne Jacob, 71, a food writer and editor, comments: “The writing is incredible. He has a very strong voice. He’s an excellent storyteller. It made food writing sexy.

“Before Anthony Bourdain, there were pretty much two kinds of food writing. There were mostly men writing about fancy restaurants and there were mostly women writing recipes. And so this was something completely new, this memoir about working in restaurants and all his other shenanigans. His voice is what knocked me out. More than anything else, it was a real bad boy persona and he was such a beautiful writer.”

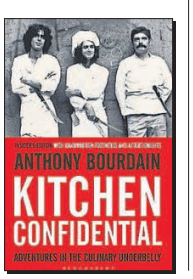
Yet when Jacob met Bourdain in person during a book tour in San Francisco, she encountered a man who seemed profoundly uncomfortable with global fame.

She recalls: “There was an older woman in the bathroom applying blush to her cleavage. There were all these men who were chefs who were full of tattoos and in love with him. When I got in line to have him sign my book, there were women passing him notes, maybe with their phone numbers. It was an incredible scene. He was charismatic but he was also a little awkward and shy.”

As the travel shows grew more successful, the TV crews bigger and the global adoration more intense, Bourdain’s private world was fracturing. The final, tragic chapter of his life began when he met the Italian actor Asia Argento. To those who had known him for decades, the change in his personality was abrupt and alarming.

Ruhlman says: “He was a completely different person after Asia. After he met her, I got an email. I had invited him to my wedding reception in New York City and he says: ‘Can’t do it. I’m in Italy shooting. I’m in love too. Love abounds. Nothing but happiness.’ A year later he’d killed himself.”

◀ *Dominic Sessa in Tony, a film based on Bourdain’s memoir, below*



Environment

A jellyfish that lives for ever?

Five favourite invertebrates

This year's Guardian invertebrate of the year competition is shining a spotlight on to some of the most spectacular, fascinating and yet overlooked inhabitants of our planet: the huge category of animals (more than 1.3m different species) that have no spine.

This group includes creatures from jellyfish to bumblebees via parasites, spiders and worms. Despite the fact that they carry out some of the most critical functions at the very base of all of our ecosystems, it's the vertebrates – pandas, lions, whales – that still garner everyone's attention. Here are our first five nominations for this year's top 10. You'll be able to vote online for your favourite on 13 August and the winner will be revealed on 17 August.

The immortal jellyfish
(Turritopsis dohrnii)

Immortality is generally considered the realm of the gods or science fiction or a fantasy pursued by tech entrepreneurs in macabre experiments. But one ethereal, thimble-shaped jellyfish has already cracked the code.

As associate professor Maria Pia Miglietta, a marine biologist at Texas A&M University, explains, *Turritopsis dohrnii*, above, has an incredible ability to cheat death.

"Turritopsis is unique, because when faced with unfavourable conditions – and I mean high temperature, physical cutting, starvation, chemicals in the water, you name it – when you try to kill the jellyfish, it doesn't die."

Most jellyfish start off life as larvae. They metamorphose into polyps (tiny, stationary soft bodies) that bud off swimming medusas, which grow up to become adult jellies. Eventually, after reproducing, most will stop swimming, crumble and die.

But the immortal jellyfish reverts to a juvenile form and starts its life cycle again.

The process is called "cellular transdifferentiation", Miglietta says. The jellyfish looks as if it's dying and sinks to the bottom. Then it shrinks into a ball, and within 24 to 48 hours, buds off a new polyp with the same identical genome.

It is one of "nature's coolest tricks", says Guardian reader Raquel López-Aragón. "When this jellyfish gets old or gets hurt, instead of just dying like most animals, it transforms itself back into a baby jellyfish and grows up all over again. It can do this as many times as it wants, which means theoretically it never has to die from getting old, it just keeps hitting the reset button on its life."

In the lab, these jellies can theoretically live for ever. For some in the wild, getting eaten may eventually end that dream run.

There are eight accepted species of Turritopsis – but (so far) only one holds the key to eternal life.

Immortal jellyfish are only a few millimetres in size. They can be found in many places, from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic, from the coast of Japan to Brazil.

Petra Stock

The leaf sheep
(Costasiella kuroshimae)

A neon green punk sheep that lives underwater. A solar-powered slug that can perform photosynthesis. If you are seeking beauty, brains and a wonderfully innovative lifestyle, then vote leaf sheep.

The leaf or sea sheep, *Costasiella kuroshimae*, main image, is a sea slug about the size of a grain of rice. Like a sheep, it grazes on green stuff – certain species of algae, which it finds in tropical waters around Japan, Indonesia and the Philippines. But its nickname does it a disservice because it is far more ingenious than any land mammal.

This animal is not only powered by the algae it grazes, but by the sun. In a process called kleptoplasty, the leaf sheep steals the algae's chloroplasts, the structures that plants use to capture sunlight and perform photosynthesis. It sequesters the intact chloroplasts within its own cells, storing them inside leaf-like branches on its back called cerata. These act like solar panels and enable the slug to power up via photosynthesis.

The beady-eyed leaf sheep lives where it feeds, on Avrainvillea, a velvety type of algae that grows in fine silts around shallow reefs.

The leaf sheep's vivid green cerata, which often feature white, pink or purple tips, provide chemical defences for this tiny animal. They give the leaf sheep its vivid green colour, which ensures it is beautifully camouflaged against the algae, which it locates via two ear-like structures above its eyes called rhinophores. These tentacles are sense and taste receptors, helping it find food and make sense of its world.

The leaf sheep was only described by science in 1993 and has soared in popularity in recent years thanks to advances in underwater and macro photography, enabling us to appreciate its rare beauty.

Patrick Barkham

The Lord Howe Island stick insect
(Dryococelus australis)

When small species are left alone to evolve for centuries on small islands, they often become larger. Quietly, over thousands of years, *Dryococelus australis*, right, grew to a great size on Lord Howe Island in the Tasman Sea between Australia and New Zealand. But the peaceful life of a stick insect, which grows up to 20cm (8ins) long was destroyed by European settlers. In 1918, a shipwreck brought black rats to the island. The flightless insects were once so common they were used by settlers as bait for fishing, but the rats wiped out the entire Lord Howe Island population in two years.

In 1964, climbers attempting to scale Ball's Pyramid, a spectacular pinnacle of basalt jutting from the ocean 12 miles (20km) off the coast of Lord Howe Island, discovered the sausage-sized carcass of one of the insects. Subsequent climbing attempts found more stick insect bodies – just never a live one.

Tantalised by these sightings, in 2001 the Australian scientists

Cabbage patch
Now is the time to get sowing
Saturday page 68

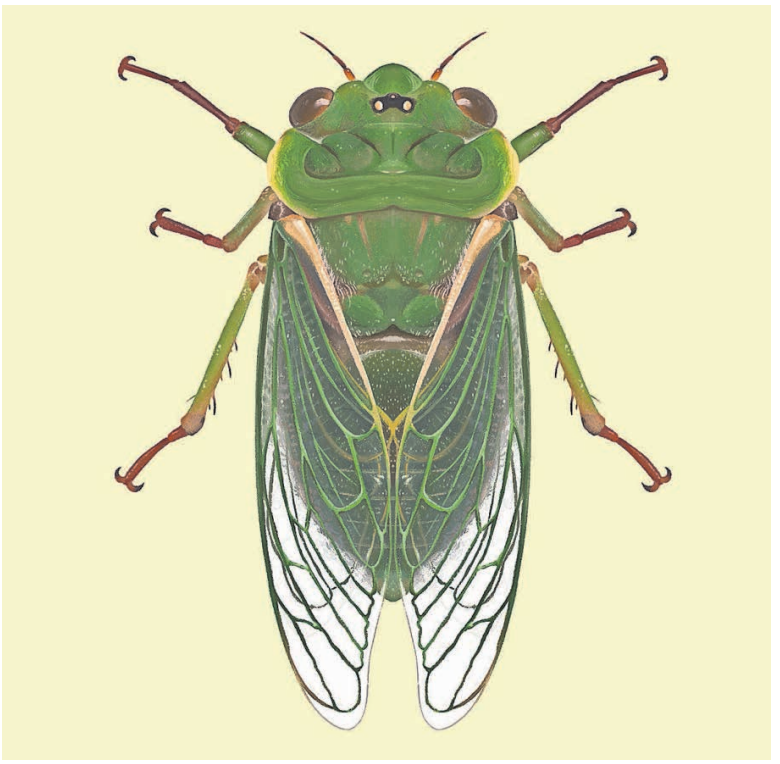
David Priddel and Nicholas Carlile made their way to the island and discovered large insect droppings under a shrub growing in a crevice 100 metres above the shoreline. Returning after dark, when the insects are active, they found three live females beneath the shrub.

The next year, 24 were discovered and a breeding pair were taken to Melbourne Zoo. Eventually, the species, fondly known as the tree lobster, was successfully bred in captivity.

Thousands of stick insects have now been reared in six zoos around the world. There are plans for reintroductions on another islet and ultimately back on Lord Howe Island itself, where the invasive black rat and house mouse population was eradicated in 2025.

Still one of the rarest invertebrates in the world, with possibly only 50 insects in the wild, this year scientists found additional individuals hidden in sparse vegetation on Ball's Pyramid.

This inspiringly tenacious insect has multiple nominations from readers. Its rediscovery and flourishing is a story of hope, according to Maximilian Vanlancker from Seattle. "Climate change is rampant, fascism on the rise, corporate greed uncontrolled, but despite it all, those 24 stick insects on a rock show us that it is never over until we give up."
Patrick Barkham



The greengrocer cicada
(Cyclochila australasiae)
Before marbles, stamps and trading cards, there were cicadas. There are thousands of cicada species globally, but for Australian children the craze centres on one particularly collectible item: the greengrocer, above.

"In both Sydney and Melbourne, greengrocers come out every now and again in fairly decent numbers, and they're coming out in leafy gardens and parks," says the environmental consultant Dr Lindsay Popple. Searching for cicadas has become entrenched in children's folklore, he says.

Most of their lives are spent as nymphs underground, but when they emerge in late spring, greengrocers are bright and abundant.

This palm-sized minibeast comes in a variety of vividly coloured morphs, each with a nickname. There's the yellow Monday, the masked devil, red warrior and chocolate soldier, and the appropriately rare, blue moon.

Dom Yates, a Guardian reader from New Zealand, is a fan. "They sing joyously after living years underground so we should appreciate their happy efforts all the more," he says.

Unlike the North American cicada, which emerges in a 17-year cycle, greengrocers materialise en masse in alternating batches, roughly at seven yearly intervals, with 2027 the next big event.

When cicada nymphs become adults, they shed their skins and grow wings, leaving behind their exoskeletons on trees and fences.

Every cicada species has its own acoustic identity, Popple says, and the Australian greengrocer, found along the east coast in some of the most populated parts of the country, is one of the loudest.

Greengrocers produce two main tunes, one a continuous drone, and the other a croaking pulse, using drum-like organs on either side of their bodies called tymbals, and amplifying the sound with their hollow abdomens.

Popple says the males broadcast at intervals throughout the day and often at dusk, trying to attract a mate. Its Queensland cousin, the northern greengrocer, is known as the "seven o'clock cicada" for its propensity to pipe up around dinnertime.

"Close to them, it's like being near a jet taking off, it's really loud," Popple says.

Greengrocer cicadas reportedly reach volumes as high as 120 decibels at close range – that's nearing the pain threshold for human hearing, according to the Australian museum.
Petra Stock

The common woodlouse
(Oniscus asellus)
Chucky pig. Slater. Monkey pea. Roly-poly. Boat-builder. Butchy boy. Cheeselog. Hobbling Andrew. Wood pig. If there were a prize for the range and joyfulness of a creature's English-language names, the humble woodlouse, above right, would triumph.

Over centuries of easy cohabitation with humans, it has acquired more than 300 regional names in Britain alone, and many more in other languages (such as Gwrach y Coed, "witch of the wood", in Welsh).

There are lovely words for woodlouse actions too: an animal rolling its body into a neat ball is known as conglobation, or volvation in zoology.

Their nicknames reflect our fondness for this most accessible of isopoda, an order of crustaceans, found in houses and gardens across Europe and the US.

The woodlouse was a trendsetter, its ancestors moving on to land about 500m years ago, long before most animals. The woodlouse hasn't needed to make many design refinements over the years because it found such a useful niche from the start. As a detritivore, it feeds on rotting plant matter and breaks down wood.

As well as tidying up the world, another of the woodlouse's superpowers is its ability to withstand toxic pollution and even store heavy metals within special compartments in its body. Studies have shown it can help stabilise heavy metals in compost.

Many readers have expressed their love for what one calls "detritivore royalty". "They will undoubtedly be here long after humans have followed dinosaurs and dodos into the extinct category," says Chris Pickard.
Patrick Barkham

Plastic packing is a key issue in drive to reduce food waste, say climate experts

Ushika Kidd

Plastic contamination should be a key concern in efforts to deal with what campaigners call one of the most "overlooked" issues of the climate crisis, food waste, researchers have said.

About one third of all food produced is wasted annually, according to UN data. In the US, 40% of food waste goes to landfill, where it is responsible for 30m metric tonnes of CO_2 equivalent per year – more than Cuba's total annual CO_2 emissions in 2024.

A new study, published in Nature Food, used life cycle analysis modelling to compare the impacts – in terms of climate, nutrient pollution, and plastic contamination – of different food waste management scenarios.

The authors, based at the University of Vermont, compared the annual climate impacts of landfilled food waste with the climate impact of alternative recycling pathways and found that diverting food waste from landfill would reduce climate impacts by 89-99%.

Non-landfill scenarios could also reduce nutrient pollution in water bodies – a process called eutrophication that occurs when excess nutrients result in algal blooms.

But the researchers also warned that microplastics can persist in the compost, which could lead to 20,000 tonnes contaminating US agricultural soils each year. No study has looked at the "plastic pollution footprint" of different food waste management strategies at national scale.

Kate Porterfield, the lead author, said the method was comparable to working out a "carbon footprint of a product or process". Essentially, the researchers looked at the process of managing food waste and "tall[ied] up what the carbon emissions [are] across all of those life cycle stages".

Porterfield said: "A large proportion of wasted food is still in packaging, it goes bad before it even reaches the consumer." One approach to recycling food waste is using a mechanical depacker; the packaging then goes to landfill, while food waste goes to "beneficial reuse, like composting or anaerobic digestion".

But researchers found that even if plastic separation technologies were 99% efficient, diverting food waste from landfills could still increase soil microplastic pollution.

"Anytime where you're diverting food waste, there is a risk of microplastic pollution [because] people aren't perfect, machines aren't perfect, and all of our food these days is packaged in plastic."

Vermont has "one of the most ambitious" state organics-diversion mandates in the US, said co-author Eric Roy.

The Universal Recycling Law requires food waste to be diverted from landfill. This applies to all households and means food scraps are banned from bins.

Phil Holtam, co-founder and director of food waste social enterprise Sussex Surplus, said: "I think there's a little bit of a misconception that [plastic packaging] is unnecessary." He added it was essential to extending the shelf life of fresh produce, particularly for smallholder farms.

"That's where the tension lies because as environmentalists we want to reduce food waste but we also want to prevent needless use of plastics."

The chef, author, and activist Max La Manna said food waste management was "one of the few climate problems where everyone wins".

La Manna, who has worked with UK farmers, said consumer expectations of perfect looking food were shaping which produce even makes it to the shops and adding to the waste issue. "Some of it may be misshapen, wonky, slightly cosmetically imperfect … [which is] challenging for supermarkets because they believe consumers want a perfect cucumber. We're allowing 'perfect' to become this enemy of good."

Ultimately, to reduce plastic contamination, Porterfield said food waste management systems needed to be "as easy as possible to make it mindless for people to separate things efficiently".

Roy advised "old school environmentalism" to reduce litter overall: "buy in bulk" and "make every effort to separate".

▶ *Of all the food produced in the world, around one third of it is wasted annually, according to the UN's figures*
PHOTOGRAPH: LEE HUDSON/ALAMY

€444
MILLION*
GOOD JOB WE PAY THE JACKPOT
OVER 30 YEARS THEN.
*Estimated jackpot. Jackpot will vary based on exchange rates after claim validation and may be subject to applicable taxes in certain scenarios. Rules, Game Specific Rules & Procedures apply. Players must be 18+.

BIGGEST JACKPOT. EVER.

POWERBALL

PLAY BY 11:55PM THIS SATURDAY

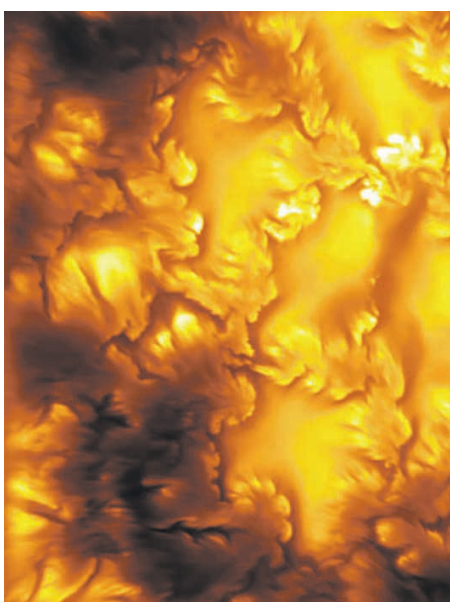
Eyewitnessed
Pictures of the week

▶ *A young woman taken from the sea by local police after crossing the border in Ceuta, Spain. Police said more than 20,000 migrants were believed to have entered the city, skirting the breakwater that separates Ceuta from Morocco*

MARIO MORAN/JNA/ZUMA/SHUTTERSTOCK

▲ *People walk on bone-dry grass along the cliff-top above the lighthouse at Beachy Head, near Eastbourne, on the south coast of England*

BROOK MITCHELL/AFP/GETTY IMAGES



◀ *Smoke billows around people leaving a block of flats hit by a Russian bomb in Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine*

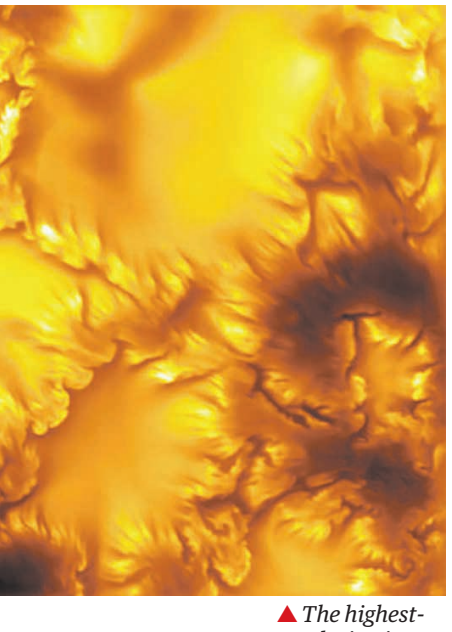
UKRINFORM/SHUTTERSTOCK

◀ *Hordes of visitors seek relief from the summer heat at the crescent-shaped, 3,500-metre stretch of Golden Beach in Qingdao in China's Shandong province*

PHOTOGRAPH: HAN JIAJUN/VCG/ GETTY IMAGES

▲ *A horse and rider commune ahead of the annual Trustees Cup polo tournament at the Nairobi Polo Club in the Kenyan capital*

GERALD ANDERSON/ ANADOLU/GETTY



▲ *The highest-resolution image of the sun's surface ever captured, taken by the Inouye solar telescope*

NSF/NSO/AURA/MPS/ AFP/GETTY IMAGES

◀ *A female Amur tiger being released back into the wild at the Ile-Balkhash state nature reserve in the Almaty region, marking the species' first return to its natural habitat in Kazakhstan in more than 70 years*

KAZAKHSTAN'S MINISTRY OF ECOLOGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES/REUTERS

World

Saudi Arabia signs Nato-style pact with Turkey and Pakistan

Patrick Wintour
Diplomatic editor

Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Turkey signed a mutual defence agreement yesterday, placing three of the Muslim world's most influential states into a Nato-style pact, as Riyadh confronts attacks from Iran-aligned Houthis in Yemen.

The pact agreed in Mecca by the Turkish president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the Saudi crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman, and Pakistan's president, Shehbaz Sharif, stipulates an attack on one country will be deemed an attack on all.

The Houthis and Saudi Arabia have increased their military exchanges in the past month and the first test of the pact may come in Yemen.

On Thursday, Houthi forces killed at least 58 Yemeni government troops in missile and drone attacks, according to a military source. A separate attack into southern Saudi Arabia, bordering Yemen, injured 11 civilians.

The three Sunni Muslim-led countries are concerned by increasing regional jeopardy after the US-Israeli war on the Shia government in Iran, with Donald Trump unable to contain the conflict.

It is disputed whether the Houthi group is acting on the instructions of Iran or instead, as it insists, trying to lift what it regards as a Saudi blockade of Houthi-controlled territory inside Yemen.

The present conflict broke out when an Iranian plane flew to the Houthi-controlled capital, Sana'a, supposedly to transport a Yemeni delegation to the funeral of the former Iranian supreme leader Ali Khamenei. Saudi intelligence claimed the plane was carrying Iranian weaponry for the Houthis.

Riyadh has already developed a 10-nation naval coalition that is supposed to protect commercial shipping from Houthi attacks in the Red Sea and the Bab-el-Mandeb strait. The Houthis insist they are firing only on Saudi-linked shipping and there is no immediate sign that the naval coalition is deterring the Houthis.

A Houthi drone strike yesterday killed three members of Yemen's government in an attack on a military camp in Marib. Ten missiles and seven explosive drones were fired. The Houthis said they were reacting to what appeared to be a large, Saudi-led military buildup.

Saudi intelligence sources say they are picking up reports not just of increased Houthi hostility but likely attacks on Saudi interests by Iranian-backed militia inside Iraq. Saudi Arabia has been working to persuade Trump not to launch massive attacks into Iran.

A Saudi spokesperson, in response to the Houthi attacks, said it did not "seek escalation but we will not allow the current balance of power on the ground to be changed".

Yemeni sources said recently they believed Saudi Arabia was preparing for a major offensive against the Houthis by sea and possibly by land in central Yemen, in a move to break their chokehold on Saudi oil exports through the southern Red Sea.

In a separate attack yesterday, a Saudi official accused the Houthis of shelling civilian areas in Saudi Arabia, injuring 11 civilians, including a four-year-old child. Maj Gen Turki al-Maliki, spokesperson for the Saudi-led military coalition supporting Yemen's government, said it would continue taking all necessary measures to protect civilians.

The attack was in southern Najran province, and injured seven Saudis, one Yemeni, two Egyptians and one Pakistani national, Maliki said. Neither the Houthis nor Iran immediately commented.

Saudi Arabia and the Houthis have been vying for control of Yemen for more than a decade, but over the past month an uneasy status quo has unravelled, with the Houthis mounting attacks against Saudi Aramco oil facilities.

The Houthi movement, which controls Sana'a and much of Yemen's Red Sea coastline, declared a naval blockade of Saudi Arabia last month.

Additional reporting **Reuters, Agence France-Presse and Associated Press**

▲ *Turkey's Erdoğan, Saudi Prince Mohammed and Pakistan's Sharif*

'We tried to stay hopeful' Grief, fear and defiance on a trip through Iran

Nawal Al-Maghafi
Minab

The excavator stops suddenly. One of the workers reaches into the rubble and pulls something free. It isn't twisted metal or broken concrete. It's a child's exercise book. The pages are still intact, covered in neat handwriting. On the front is a name: Mahya Salari. She was eight years old.

Five months after a missile tore through Shajareh Tayyebeh primary school in Minab, southern Iran, excavators are still clearing the site. According to the Minab prosecutor's office, 156 people, including 120 children, were killed here when a US-made Tomahawk cruise missile struck on the first day of the war.

Across the city, portraits of the dead cover walls, shopfronts and roadside billboards, turning Minab into a symbol of civilian suffering.

When the US-Israeli attack on Iran began on 28 February, Donald Trump urged Iranians to "seize control of your destiny". Instead, the conflict reshaped Iran in ways few expected.

The overnight train from Tehran to Bandar Abbas runs almost 900 miles (1,400km), linking Iran's political heart with its strategic southern coastline on the strait of Hormuz. It passes mountains, desert and the nuclear sites of Natanz and Fordow before reaching the Gulf. Onboard are students, footballers, businessmen and families. People from every corner of Iran, each carrying their own version of what the war has meant.

▲ *A boy at the funeral last month of Iran's leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei*

Azadeh, a lawyer, says the first days of the conflict were frightening. "It is in every Iranian's nature to adapt," she says. "We tried to continue living our lives, to keep our routines and remain hopeful."

When asked what she thought about the protests at the start of the year and about the many who believed war could bring political change, she pauses before quietly declining to answer and turning her head away from the conversation.

Inside the sleeper carriage, conversations drift swiftly between family, work and everyday life,

Thai school shooting
Teen kills seven and injures more than 30
Page 30

Shear audacity
New Zealand's wool industry is revived
Page 33

◀ *Mourning victims of the US missile strike on a school that killed 156 people, including 120 children*
PHOTOGRAPH: JACK GARLAND/BBC

but politics is different. Speaking openly about politics in Iran carries obvious risks.

Her travelling companion, Sepideh, a beautician, is more willing to talk. "I love Iran," she says. "I love it so much. But when I see my youth slipping away and my dreams disappearing, I have no choice but to leave."

Farther down the train, two young footballers are travelling home. The domestic league has resumed after a months-long suspension. Asked what they remember most about the war, Abdollah says: "They attacked a school that was full of children … They were seven, eight and nine years old. Our whole country was upset. The day of the funeral … everyone cried."

At Bandar Abbas, a road then turns inland towards Minab, a two-hour journey. It is a city known for its date palms and its busy Thursday market. Today, the war dominates almost every street.

Portraits of children killed in the school attack hang from buildings and lamp-posts. At the edge of the city, Shajareh Tayyebeh primary school remains a shell. Concrete floors have collapsed on to one another. Twisted steel protrudes from shattered classrooms while excavators continue clearing the site. Among the rubble lies Mahya Salari's exercise book. Mahya had been at school with her younger brother, Ali. Their mother arrived to collect them shortly before the strike. All three were killed.

Amaineh Nademi taught first grade here for six years. "You can't call it a school any more," she says. "There are only walls that smell of death, grief and blood."

She remembers parents running barefoot towards the building. "I thought everyone had escaped. I didn't know they were all under the rubble."

The Pentagon has so far provided no answers on the bombing, which came during strikes on an adjacent military compound.

Reza Besharati, a Red Crescent responder, says he still relives that morning: "Even now, I remember everything."

For some Iranians who once hoped outside pressure might weaken the government, Minab became a turning point.

"I accepted there being a war," one former protester says. "But not at the price of innocent people being killed. War destroys everything. It makes no distinction between good people and bad."

At Minab's cemetery, children weave between rows of small graves while families shelter from the afternoon sun. Masoumeh Mehran Shekhabadi comes here almost every day. Her nine-year-old daughter, Setayesh, was killed in the strike. "When I arrived there was only the smell of smoke and children's hair," she says. "I saw a hand. I saw a foot. They had been torn to pieces."

Back in Tehran, during a brief pause in the fighting, hundreds of thousands, and by official accounts millions, gather for the funeral of Iran's supreme leader, Ali Khamenei, four months after his death. Portraits line the streets. Revolutionary songs echo through loudspeakers. Chants of "Death to America" and "Death to Israel" ripple through the crowds. The funeral is a moment of mourning and a carefully choreographed display of political unity.

"I know many people who opposed the government," says Soraya, attending her first political march. "Today they support it." Whether that reflects wider public opinion is impossible to know.

Across Iran there is no single narrative of the war. From the ruins of a school in Minab to the crowds gathered in Tehran, the journey reveals a country transformed by war. As the conflict continues, so does the struggle to shape the legacy it will leave behind.

Nawal Al-Maghafi is a BBC senior international investigations correspondent. Her report for Global Eye from Iran is on BBC iPlayer

Tehran

Dragging out talks to keep Trump in war could backfire

Patrick Wintour
Diplomatic editor

Tehran has set out a protracted negotiating timetable designed to keep Donald Trump embroiled in the Iran conflict until the US midterm elections, in the hope of inflicting the same ruinous blow on his presidency that the 1979-81 US embassy hostage crisis dealt to Jimmy Carter.

For many inside Iran, revenge on Trump is a legitimate and self-standing war aim. While Iranian officials have not trusted the US since the 1979 Islamic revolution, that animus is now personal and Trump's political demise has become a subject of obsessive speculation in Tehran. Iranian media track his waning ratings, attributing the decline to the war's unpopularity and high oil prices.

The focus on the US midterms became more obvious this week when Kazem Gharibabadi, an Iranian deputy foreign minister, told the official IRNA news agency that after agreeing a route for shipping in the strait of Hormuz, it would take two to four months to reach the key second phase of negotiations on Tehran's nuclear programme.

To get to that stage, he laid out conditions including the lifting of sanctions, the end of the US blockade of Iranian ports, the unfreezing of assets and new commitments on non-belligerence.

If the Iranians get their way on this timetable, Trump will be going to the polls with no Iranian commitment on nuclear weapons, only a hefty economic bill for a failed war. "This raises the very likely scenario of continued cycles of conflict between the US and Tehran over the strait," said Jason Brodsky, from United Against a Nuclear Iran, an advocate of the war. "There won't be any true quiet before the midterm elections - Tehran has no interest in giving this to the Trump administration … It will continue to play games."

Some in Iran believe the loss of Congress will inhibit Trump, lead to his impeachment, or at the very least mark the end of the war's funding. Mostafa Zahrani, a former Iranian diplomat, argued that electoral defeat "will make it inevitable that Trump will not be able to go back to war and will take the negotiations seriously".

Others such as Nasser Hadian, a professor of international relations at Tehran University, disagree. He is an advocate of cashing in Iran's victories now rather than waiting for Trump to become weaker. He said: "If he loses, he'll have less incentive to reach an agreement with Iran, because in that case he'll be weakened, and Israel and others will find it much easier to attack him - something they don't dare do now. Those who say we should wait for the midterm elections have no understanding of politics in America."

> ***'Those who say that we should wait for the midterm elections have no understanding of politics in America'***
>
> **Nasser Hadian**
> *Tehran University*

However, Iranian diplomats overall believe Trump's freedom to act will indeed be constrained by the unpopularity of more conflict and by Republican presidential candidates' eagerness to wrap it up. Trump would also be at risk of seeing his whole second term consumed by a disastrous war.

The bigger question is what Iran itself wants to achieve. Agreeing to keep the dispute simmering until November is not an answer to that question - one that Iranians are better at debating than resolving.

The Iranian president, Masoud Pezeshkian, repeatedly says he does not want endless war, and insists the vast majority of the supreme national security council concur. He still has faith in the memorandum of understanding (MoU) agreed in June, saying it should be the cornerstone of Iran's foreign policy.

But the Kayhan newspaper, one of the conservatives' chief outlets, describes the MoU as worthless since the US always breaks its commitments. "Accordingly, officials should know that the strait of Hormuz is not a bargaining chip and should not be opened as a passage for America," it said.

Hardliners and moderates have visions of the war leading to a new regional security architecture. But the hardliners put the emphasis on the US's expulsion from the region and see this as something less to be negotiated and more to be enforced, using control of the strait of Hormuz's entry points as a lever to close American bases.

Pezeshkian says he sees a place for legitimate US investment in Iran, while the former foreign minister Javad Zarif in a fresh essay this week argued that Iran in "a post-polar era would benefit from not depending solely on Russia and China in future".

If Iran developed "a balanced and multifaceted foreign policy", Tehran would not be forced into relationships based on necessity, he wrote. "Continuing uncontrolled tensions with the United States not only imposes direct costs on Iran, but also makes it more difficult for other countries, even close partners such as China and Russia, to cooperate with Iran."

So just as Trump cannot resolve from one sentence to the next what he thinks of Iran, nor can Iran yet agree what it thinks it can get from the US.

◀ *Personal revenge on Trump is seen as a legitimate aim in Tehran*
PHOTOGRAPH: EVELYN HOCKSTEIN/REUTERS

School shooting shakes Thailand, with eight killed including suspect and grandparents

◀ *Students hurry to evacuate the school after the incident. Casualties included more than 30 injured*
PHOTOGRAPH: CHALINEE THIRASUPA/REUTERS

Natasha May
Bangkok

A Thai teenager killed his grandparents before opening fire at his school, where he shot five people dead and took his own life, police have said, in an attack that has shaken a country struggling to deal with gun violence.

The 14-year-old injured more than 30 people in the shooting at the prestigious Debsirin Nonthaburi school north-west of Bangkok. Nine people were in a critical condition, the Thai health department said.

For Prompong Namwong, an English teacher at the school, it was a normal morning until a panicked student from another class flung open the door, trying to find somewhere to hide. In the corridor, Prompong heard other teachers shouting that there had been a mass shooting downstairs.

When Prompong recounted the ordeal to the Guardian, he hesitated between calling the 14-year-old, whom he saw run in front of his classroom, "killer" or "student".

At that moment, "I thought I was going to die, for sure," he said.

The suspected attacker fired at least 26 bullets with a gun belonging to his grandfather, and was found with 34 additional ammunition rounds.

The suspected shooter remained inside the school after reports of the attack emerged, Arsit Sampantharat, the permanent secretary of the interior ministry, told PPTV.

A lockdown at the school was declared over in about half an hour. Prompong said that when he heard a knock, he thought it was the end of his life, but instead it was the police coming to their rescue.

Images from the scene showed students running with only socks on their feet as they were evacuated from the school. The children, as is customary across Asia, had taken their shoes off outside their classrooms, but in the panic to escape the grounds they had left the shoes strewn around lunch tables and the stairs outside classrooms.

By the afternoon, the sports area where the students would usually have been playing was filled with officials and media, as the country's leader vowed to implement new gun laws. The prime minister, Anutin Charnvirakul, told reporters the new law would allow only government officials on duty to carry guns, but did not provide any specifics, including whether the legislation would tighten gun ownership requirements.

▲ *Rescue workers help distraught family members and, right, an injured teacher* PHOTOGRAPHS: SIPA US/ ALAMY; CHALINEE THIRASUPA/REUTERS

Thailand has the highest rate of civilian gun ownership in south-east Asia, and the Switzerland-based Small Arms Survey in 2017 placed the country 13th worldwide for small-gun possession.

Mass shootings have regularly occurred in Thailand, including incidents at schools and a large Bangkok mall, and a 2022 attack in the country's north-east that killed 37 people, including 22 children.

The country's licensing regime still lacks mental health screening for people applying to have a gun and does not require periodic reassessments for licence holders, according to Piyaporn Tunneekul, an associate professor at Nakhon Pathom Rajabhat University in Thailand.

Pichanan Thiengtham was in the teachers' lounge when she heard the shots at about 10am. But she said she could not believe at first that it was a gun .“There were so many shots and they lasted for a long time without stopping," she said.

It was only when the art teacher saw one of the injured students that she realised what was happening. "I took the injured student to get first aid and then transferred them to the hospital [in the school] building."

Kiatikhun Verapongpradith, an emergency worker, arrived as the shooting was taking place. He said his team had treated students with injuries in the back, chest and arms.

They found a male teacher lying dead on an upper floor of the school, and in another room they found a female teacher with wounds to her chest and arm, Kiatikhun said.

The school is part of the Debsirin network, founded by the Thai royal family. Its alumni include prime ministers, scholars and writers.

Prompong found out in the school's group chat that some of his friends had not survived.

"They're all good teachers," he said. "I don't know what to say. My life has to go on, but right now ... it's a very great shock. I never thought to myself that it would happen - really happen - in my school."

Additional reporting
Reuters and Associated Press

Race to house hundreds camping in Rome heat after squat eviction

Angela Giuffrida
Rome

Rome authorities are scrambling to find homes for hundreds of people sleeping in tents in extreme heat after talks aimed at saving Italy's most high-profile centre for housing and social assistance collapsed amid a crackdown by Giorgia Meloni's government on squatted buildings.

The approximately 400 evicted residents of Spin Time Labs, located in a 10-floor building in Rome's Esquilino district occupied by grassroots groups since 2013, will not be allowed to move back in after its private owner refused Rome council's offer to buy the property. The residents were forced out at the end of last month.

A spokesperson for Italy's interior ministry, which had set its sights on shutting down Spin Time Labs, confirmed that the owner had taken repossession of the building "in accordance with the law".

The move has reignited political debate over occupied or squatted buildings, which Meloni's government regard as dens for criminality - including those supported by leftwing associations. Critics have questioned why Meloni and her coalition allies have long been so decisively against Spin Time Labs while the neofascist CasaPound has occupied a state-owned building in the same neighbourhood for more than 20 years, using the premises as its headquarters.

People of all nationalities, about a quarter of them children, were forced to evacuate Spin Time Labs on 29 July after a minor fire, which was quickly extinguished by a group of residents before it could spread.

▲ *About 400 residents were forced out after a minor fire at the end of July*

The building was locked up by police during safety checks, before being placed under two judicial seizure orders.

While some people were accommodated by friends and family, more than 200, including elderly people and those with ill health, have been sleeping in tents outside the building. One child was hospitalised this week with breathing difficulties.

Rome's leftwing council is now seeking alternative solutions. The mayor of Rome, Roberto Gualtieri, said the council's offer to buy the site was met with an "irrevocable no" and that he "had the impression that the decision had already been taken".

▼ *People watch a 2023 eclipse. Next week's will be the first of three visible from Spain in the next two years*

PHOTOGRAPH: ALFREDO ESTRELLA/AFP

Don't look now Spain braced for total eclipse

Sam Jones
Somosierra

Little stirs in the mountains above Somosierra beyond the wind that lashes the flat peaks, the cows that graze on parched grass and the sun that beats down on the abandoned aerodrome where generations of glider pilots learned to ride air currents.

But all this stillness will disappear, albeit temporarily, on the evening of 12 August, when swathes of northern and eastern Spain and the Balearic islands experience a total solar eclipse, the likes of which has not been seen here for more than 120 years.

The rare celestial alignment has suddenly turned Somosierra – a small village that sits at an altitude of 1,440 metres where the northernmost reaches of the Madrid region fade into neighbouring Castilla y León and Castilla-La Mancha – into a prime astrotourist destination. No site as close to the Spanish capital will enjoy what Somosierra will: one minute and 29 seconds of pure, clear-skied total eclipse.

Awe-inspiring as the event promises to be, however, it has thrown up all sorts of unexpected but pressing questions for the village and its 93 inhabitants.

With as many as 2,000 visitors expected, where will everyone park? Will there be enough water? And, last but not least, how many batches of paella will the local restaurant need to prepare?

"The fact that we've been selected as the best place in the Madrid region to watch the eclipse has led to a huge amount of media and social media coverage," said Somosierra council's tourism manager, Irma López Muñoz, as she looked out across the eclipse observation site, a 10-minute drive up past the village.

"That's generated a lot of interest among people in Madrid – and some from abroad. So we're anticipating a large influx of visitors because it is a unique event that hasn't been seen for over 100 years."

Even before the recent huge wildfires broke out to the west of Madrid, Somosierra council was thinking about how to minimise risk factors on the day of the eclipse and has been coordinating its efforts with police and civil protection authorities.

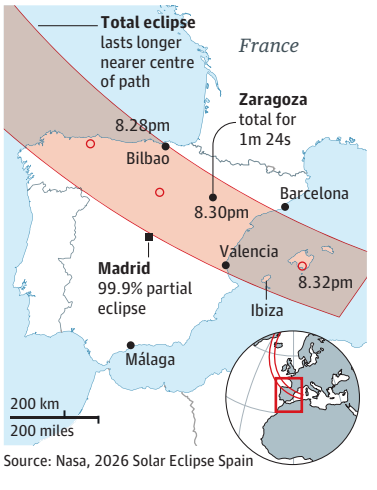
Although the village council has offered 400 official registration slots, it believes five times as many people could turn up on the day.

"We're very close to a major European capital with a huge population, and many people are going to come without seeking out information beforehand," said López Muñoz. "That's beyond our control. We can't predict that someone might be watching television and say: 'Well, I'm going to make some sandwiches and see the eclipse with my children.'"

▲ *The mountains near Somosierra are expected to attract thousands of visitors from nearby Madrid*

PHOTOGRAPH: BEN ROBERTS/PANOS PICTURES

Total solar eclipse: 12 August 2026



Source: Nasa, 2026 Solar Eclipse Spain

With that in mind, the council is scrambling to recruit and educate volunteers to help steward events on 12 August. It recently hired El Nocturnario, a company of astrotourism experts, to deliver a day's training to the volunteers who had gathered in Somosierra's tiny cultural centre to learn about the joys and dangers of eclipses.

One of the volunteers, María Gradaille, said she was delighted to help out with what she called "a once-in-a-lifetime event and a historic scientific milestone". She was also grateful for the knowledge and the tips she had picked up at the training session.

"I've learned so much about the eclipse," she said. "I didn't know it could burn your eyes so badly or just how dangerous it can be."

According to Sarai de la Hoz, one of El Nocturnario's co-founders, local and regional authorities around Spain are belatedly beginning to wake up the potential benefits of all things astronomical. The looming total solar eclipse will be followed by a six-minute-long "eclipse of the century" in August next year, and a spectacular "ring of fire eclipse" in January 2028.

Little wonder, then, that the Spanish government has set up a special committee to oversee the trio of eclipses. As the government spokesperson Elma Saiz Delgado pointed out on Tuesday, the events will put Spain "at the centre of global astronomical observation and astrotourism". This first eclipse alone is expected to attract 446,000 additional visitors in a year when tourist numbers in Spain could pass the 100-million mark for the first time. The event is also forecast to bring in an extra €342m (£293m) in tourist revenue.

"When we started talking about the eclipse a year ago, people kind of thought we were mad. They were like: 'It's not going to be that big a deal', and: 'Not that many people will come,'" said De la Hoz. "But as time's gone by and the authorities have realised what's to come, we're been getting calls from people who need our help."

While much of the training she and her colleagues provide is about eclipses and how to watch one safely, the classes also involve a lot of logistics.

Authorities in the Balearics, which are bracing for huge numbers of extra visitors, have already announced that restrictions will be introduced on 20 main roads across Mallorca, Ibiza, Menorca and Formentera from 3pm until 9pm on the day of the eclipse.

Practicalities of a rather different nature are on the mind of Yolanda Cerezo, who has run the Hotel Restaurante El Puerto de Somosierra for the past 26 years. Sitting on the shady terrace of the hotel and restaurant, Cerezo pondered the possibility of a tenfold increase in the 200 to 300 customers she would normally serve on a busy day.

"We've had some big one-day events and parties, but we've never seen this kind of volume," she said. "The eclipse is going to be a long day, but we have to make the most of it. We're not going to see another day like it, are we? It'll be unique."

Cerezo is hoping to get the necessary licences to set up a stall and a bar at the observation site.

"If I do a massive paella and it runs out, I'll ring down to my people in the kitchen here and they'll prepare another one and bring it up," she said. "We can't leave people stuck halfway up a mountain with nothing to eat."

‘Her face was beaten in’

How Taliban rule brought in a new era of Afghan women being killed

Khadija Haidary, Zahra Nader, Hura Omar* and Atousa Azar*
for Zan Times

In a voice message recorded weeks before she died, Liza Shams, 33, asked a relative to pray for her. “There’s no end to my days of misfortune,” she said. “Pray that God shames Hasib [her husband, Hasibullah Sarwari] in front of the whole world for what he has done to me.”

In a second recording, Shams described being beaten by Sarwari while pregnant, then kept isolated for days, injured to the point she could not eat or speak. “I’m a woman, fine, I should not talk about what happens in my home,” she said. “But I can’t do this any more.”

On the afternoon of 1 February, her neighbours heard screaming and alerted the police. A short while earlier, her father, Shamsuddin Shams, had received a video call from his daughter. Her injuries were shocking. “Her jaw was broken and she could hardly talk,” he said, but she had managed to pass the message that her husband had beaten her again.

Shamsuddin Shams immediately called his two other daughters living close by, who arrived at the house and took her to Rahmat hospital in Kabul. About an hour after her arrival, Liza Shams died.

The report on her death showed that her face had been beaten in. The CT scan findings described multiple fractures to her cheekbones and sinus walls, an injury pattern consistent with enormous blunt-force trauma to the face. Photographs of her body and the report’s physical examination, conducted the evening she died, document extensive bruising, injuries and swelling across her face and body.

▲ *Liza Shams’ death was recorded as suicide despite her extensive injuries*

Despite the extensive nature of her injuries, the forensic report listed the probable cause of death as ingesting rat-poison, noting an autopsy was not performed at the family’s request (Shams’ father said this request came from her in-laws).

Her husband’s family did not respond to questions, but have argued that she took her own life, and that the bruising covering her body was a side-effect of poison.

Suicide is frequently listed as the cause of death in Afghanistan in cases in which women die in violent circumstances – a designation that typically means no one will be held accountable for the death. Shams’ father believes her death was murder.

The Taliban does not collect any data on how many Afghan women are killed each year. The attorney general’s office, which used to collate this information, was abolished in 2023.

To measure what the state will not, reporters for Zan Times, a collective of journalists who work undercover in Afghanistan, collected cases of women killed in 10 of Afghanistan’s 34 provinces since the Taliban returned to power in August 2021, drawing on 174 instances reported by local media, as well as 57 cases documented directly by the journalists but previously unreported.

The investigation found women across Afghanistan were being killed at home by husbands, fathers and brothers, in a system that all but guaranteed impunity for the crime. Many cases were never entered into official records.

The team documented 231 cases, of which 53 were declared suicide. The provinces with the highest recorded tolls were Jawzjan (36), Herat (32), Badakhshan (28) and Ghazni (26). The age of victims ranged from girls as young as five to women of 65. Seven out of 10 victims – 165 of 231 – were housewives with no independent income or institutional standing to pursue a domestic violence case.

Most cases occurred in the victim’s home. Across the dataset, only 58 arrests were recorded. More than one in five of the total cases were officially declared suicide, even when there was significant evidence of foul play.

In the cases where an arrest was made, the suspect was often released, sometimes just a day after being detained.

The reporters found a number of deaths that according to family or witnesses had resulted from domestic violence, but were being officially recorded as suicides.

A healthcare worker in Jawzjan said many of the dead women that came to hospital and were labelled suicides had clearly been beaten, their bodies covered in wounds and bruises.

Freshta Emady, 33, a UN agency employee in Kabul, was found dead in her home on 31 May. Her husband reportedly told Taliban police she had killed herself, citing a psychiatric condition.

Her family and friends, however, believe she was killed by her husband. Five people who knew her said Emady, who had been married off at 17, had spent 15 years being beaten, choked and controlled. A colleague said Emady had described her husband repeatedly strangling her and telling her: “I’ll cut your throat.”

Often, there can be deadly consequences when families try to intervene on behalf of daughters or sisters. In Kandahar, a 14-year-old girl was killed after being given into marriage to a much older man. Her husband was violent, and she fled to her father’s family. When her husband came to force her home in October 2024, she refused to go. He drew a pistol and killed her. Her younger brother, who ran to help, was also shot and died a week later.

> ***‘I’m a woman, fine, I should not talk about what happens in my home. But I can’t do this any more’***
>
> **Liza Shams**
> *Voice message*

▲ *A mural in Kabul in 2020, when gender-based violence rates were already three times the global average* PHOTOGRAPH: WAKIL KOHSAR/GETTY

The Taliban opened a file but her husband, a serving member of the group, was never arrested.

In May in Sar-e-Pol province, Sara, 16, and her mother, Chaman, an Iranian-trained doctor, were shot dead by a local Taliban official who had forced an engagement on the teenager. When Chaman refused to hand her daughter over without the agreed dowry, he beat her with his rifle and, as Sara ran to her mother, he shot them both. He was captured after a manhunt and remains in jail.

The Taliban’s new criminal code means a husband’s punishment for beating his wife to the point of visible injury such as fracture or wounds is capped at 15 days’ imprisonment. If a wife goes to her family’s house without her husband’s permission, however, and her family does not return her on request, she and her family are subject to three months in prison. The code creates a legal structure in which seeking refuge from domestic violence brings a worse punishment than the violence itself.

Even before the Taliban, women in Afghanistan were experiencing gender-based violence at rates nearly three times higher than the global average.

The UN Women’s 2024 Afghanistan Gender Index, which was published in June last year, found that in 2018, almost 35% of Afghan women had reported violence from a partner in the previous 12 months – compared with a global average of 13% of women.

Since the Taliban’s return to power, the scant protections that previously existed for women facing violence have been stripped away. After August 2021, the Taliban dissolved the Ministry of Women’s Affairs, the special

prosecutor's office for violence against women, and the country's shelter network. About 250 female judges were removed from the bench; female prosecutors were sent home.

Afghan law no longer permits a woman to be a direct party to her own legal case, so mothers cannot pursue justice for their daughters. In Takhar province, Shamsia (not her real name), the mother of a 23-year-old woman who was stabbed and set on fire by her husband in May 2025, said she had been ordered by the local court to transfer power of attorney to her husband to pursue the case because a woman could not be "a direct party to a petition or case file". Months on, the case has gone nowhere.

Our reporters could not interview most of the families of the women killed. Fear closed many doors; in several provinces, the journalists received threats after even attempting to make contact. The 231 cases in the dataset are not Afghanistan's femicide total – they provide only a snapshot of the potential killings, the dynamics that enable them and the impunity that many killers enjoy.

Liza Shams' case will probably be decided by a Taliban court. Her father, who has little hope of anyone being held responsible, has turned to social media, publishing recordings, hospital footage and documents in a campaign for justice for his daughter. He said that speaking up has already come with a cost. His daughters who took Liza to hospital were subsequently summoned by the Taliban and have now gone into hiding. "It is because we spoke to the media, the Taliban don't want issues like this to become public."

Among the recordings her father released was a voice message Liza Shams sent to her brother-in-law, in which she spoke about her marriage and her life. "I feel like I'm suffocating," she said. "I suffer from these things. I'll try every day, I'll try every day, but this isn't working. Our life can't go on like this. I don't want our life to be bitter. My children are growing up, they'll look at us and see that we are fighting. But it can't go on like this."

▲ *Liza Shams in a family portrait. Her father believes she was murdered*

** Zan Times reporters inside Afghanistan write under pen names for their safety. Additional reporting: Sophia Malek, Tarana Mohammadi, Simon Danishjo, Atia Farazar, Faranak, Horia, Roya, Tamga, Maria, Gawharshad, Raha and Nahid*

Sunny outlook for sheep

New Zealand wool back in vogue after steady decline

Eva Corlett
Wellington

John Hargreaves' family has farmed sheep and beef in Kaiwaka, north of Auckland, for generations. In the 1960s, they had 3,000 ewes but in the decades since, as the value of wool declined and costs grew, his flock slowly decreased to just over 1,700.

But now, for the first time in about six years, his wool is making money.

New Zealand's once famous wool industry is showing signs of a comeback, after the mounting costs of producing synthetic fabric triggered global demand for natural fibres. "We're now covering our shearing costs and making some sort of a profit," Hargreaves said.

Wool production dominated New Zealand's agricultural industry for nearly a century, with the number of sheep peaking at more than 70 million by the 1980s – or roughly 22 sheep to every human.

The economic policies of the 1980s, and a drop in global demand driven by the uptake of synthetic alternatives, drove down the price of wool. More recently, farmers have converted their pasture into more lucrative forestry blocks and dairy farming. There are now just over 23 million sheep, or 4.5 sheep to every human, according to Statistics New Zealand.

But Dave Burridge, national wool auction manager for PGG Wrightson, says the tight supply of wool globally and rising oil prices driven by the Middle East conflict are pushing up demand for wool.

"The raw material used to produce nylon and polyester fibres, they've all gone up in price," pushing buyers from countries such as China and India towards natural fibres.

Major global brands are also seeking out New Zealand wool. In April, French luxury brand Chanel signed an investment deal with Lammermoor Station, a 5,200-hectare (12,840-acre) farm in the Paerau Valley, to part-own and support the production of premium wool. The American clothing company Patagonia visited New Zealand in June tolook into wool partnerships, and in May, the Turkish carpet manufacturer Kalida Halı struck a deal with Wools of New Zealand.

In June, the country's wool fetched some of the highest prices in 15 years at auction – ranging from NZ$6.47 (£2.82) to NZ$6.80 a kilogram for crossbred fleeces, with top-quality, good-colour fleeces, free from marks, reaching nearly NZ$8/kg.

There is still volatility in the market. Wool prices dipped at the most recent national auction, held in Christchurch on 30 July. The drop, partly driven by buyers stepping back after filling their commitments earlier in the season, was unsurprising, Burridge said.

"There was always quiet concern by players that the price had gone up very quickly, like unparalleled rises that we'd never seen before, and … that things were going to probably come off at some stage."

But prices are still up NZ$2 on a year ago, and Burridge is hopeful for the industry's future. "I feel really excited about the long-term prospects, and convinced wool will have its day in the sun again."

Meanwhile, demand for New Zealand's high-quality wool is increasing within India, New Zealand's second-largest wool market, Federated Farmers' wool and meat manager, Richard Dawkins, says. A recent trade deal between the two countries will eliminate tariffs on wool.

New Zealand's culture needs to re-embrace wool to help bring stability to the market, Dawkins said. "It's one thing asking the world to buy our product, but we also need to embrace it ourselves."

▼ *Sheep wait in the shed yards for shearing in John Hargreaves' farm in Kaiwaka, New Zealand*
PHOTOGRAPH: FIONA GOODALL/GETTY IMAGES

▼ *Despite critics questioning the RCMP's role in policing, Ottawa has pledged to increase the force's budget*

PHOTOGRAPH: RENE JOHNSTON/TORONTO STAR

Canada's 'Mounties' face uncertain future amid scandals and demands for reform

Olivia Bowden
Toronto

With their bright red tunics, dark blue breeches and beige stetsons, the officers of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) offer a globally recognised symbol of Canada.

The "Mounties", as they are colloquially known, have even featured in Hollywood films and The Simpsons.

But the RCMP is facing an increasingly uncertain future amid questions over its core role and a string of scandals that range from claims of systemic racism to sexual harassment and public safety failures.

"We need to modernise and transform the RCMP, but we are a very long way away … unfortunately, the future doesn't look particularly bright," said Kent Roach, a law professor at the University of Toronto, who this week published a book on the pressures besetting the RCMP titled Red Alert.

On a national level, the RCMP handles security issues including foreign interference and terrorism, but also offers local policing services in eight of the country's 10 provinces and all three territories.

Those local policing contracts are set to expire in 2032, and even though the date is six years away, provincial leaders have called on the federal government to "urgently begin negotiations" for new agreements.

"The federal government must provide a clear decision on the future of RCMP contract policing," provincial premiers said in a joint communique after a meeting in Prince Edward Island last month.

The request for clarity on the contracts appears to have been prompted in part by the resignation of Justin Trudeau and his replacement as prime minister by Mark Carney in March last year.

Trudeau argued for widespread reform of the RCMP, recommending the force abandon boots-on-the-ground policing to focus on national security.

But the Carney government has instead increased pay for RCMP cadets and committed an additional C$1.8bn (£960m) in spending over four years to its policing budget. Roach said one of the reasons for the investment was pressure from the US administration to crack down on supposed border issues.

But Roach argues that the RCMP in its current form is not feasible due to structural issues. Mounties typically operate in small, often temporary detachments in Canada's rural communities where they do not speak local Indigenous languages.

> ***'The RCMP seems stuck in a very paramilitary and colonial approach'***
>
> **Prof Kent Roach**
> *University of Toronto*

That language gap feeds a historical lack of trust among First Nations communities, due to the force's colonial roots as a tool of repression. From its inception, the force enacted government rules that restricted the movement of Indigenous people, and from the 1930s, RCMP officers forced Indigenous children to attend abusive residential schools, according to the force's own records.

The strained relationship between the RCMP and Indigenous communities has been exacerbated by a series of high-profile cases.

The deaths of two Indigenous men, Dale Culver in 2017 and Jared Lowndes in 2021, after violent interactions with RCMP officers led to a public outcry. After the 2016 murder of Colton Boushie, the official watchdog for the RCMP found that the force had discriminated against Boushie's family.

The Mounties are also accused of systemic sexual harassment: a 2021 class action lawsuit resulted in the federal government paying more than C$125m to 2,304 female RCMP members, who said they had experienced sexual assault and harassment while on duty.

In the past decade, the RCMP has contended with two mass killings that led to wider criticisms around the force's abilities to keep the public safe. In April 2020, a man dressed as a Mountie killed 22 people in a shooting rampage in Nova Scotia. A government probe found that a string of RCMP missteps worsened the attack, as the force failed to share information with the public and its own officers. The RCMP came under further criticism in September 2022 over its slow response to a mass stabbing that killed 11 people on the James Smith Cree Nation in Saskatchewan and the nearby village of Weldon.

Several scholars have called on the RCMP to be replaced with a national service better equipped to confront 21st-century security threats.

Roach argued that Canada should consider other models rather than the RCMP "one size fits all" approach to all jurisdictions.

"The way the RCMP trained … is very much out of touch," he said. "The RCMP seems stuck in a very paramilitary and frankly colonial approach."

Public Safety Canada, the federal agency responsible for national security, said Ottawa was in discussions with provinces and territories on "policing needs beyond 2032".

Florida boater 'tried to cut off diver's air' over lobster dispute

Ramon Antonio Vargas

A boater allegedly tried to kill a diver by cutting off his air supply while they fought over a spot to catch lobsters, according to authorities in Florida.

Michael Joseph Simpson Jr, 51, is accused of attempted murder after what a sheriff's office report portrayed as a particularly heated case of boat rage on Miami's Biscayne Bay. Simpson denies the charges.

According to the report, the alleged victim, Hunter Coffer, was onboard a vessel preparing to search for lobsters on the morning of 29 July when another boat pulled up and circled the area several times.

People on the vessel began arguing that their "spot" had been stolen by those on Coffer's boat. Another larger boat then arrived as the bickering continued and Coffer dived into the water while connected to an apparatus that supplied breathing air from the surface.

People were warned to stay away from Coffer's breathing apparatus – a tankless, surface-supplied diving system marketed as Brownie's Third Lung – because it was being used, the sheriff's report said.

It added that Simpson then said: "I'll turn the Brownie off if I want to." He also allegedly swam up to the apparatus, turned it off and deprived Coffer of his air supply in view of several witnesses.

According to the sheriff's report, at least one of Coffer's companions shouted: "We have a diver down there, you asshole!"

One of them then jumped into the water and pulled Coffer to the surface using the air hose to which he was connected.

Coffer was said to be gasping for air, disoriented and entangled by the hose as well as a boat anchor line when he surfaced.

The sheriff's report alleged that a witness took photos and video of the encounter on a mobile, with footage showing Simpson "swimming rapidly away from … the Brownie after it was shut off".

Simpson then "fled" onboard the larger boat while accompanied by the other vessel, the sheriff's office said. Howard Srebnick, a lawyer for Simpson, said in a statement issued on Thursday that his client "never disabled anyone's diving equipment".

He added: "Video footage of the event corroborates that one of the accusers fell off their boat and became entangled in the third-lung device while Mr Simpson was nowhere near it."

"Simpson has devoted his life to boating safety," Srebnick's statement said. "He has earned a reputation as one of south Florida's safest and most responsible boaters and serves on a boating safety council."

John Crace's diary
Nige has a week to get his story straight
Page 37

Dorky, yet delightful
Three stars for Ted Lasso's return to TV
Page 40

Spotlight

The Saturday Read

By **Ajit Niranjan**

Scientists race to understand the devastating impact of toxic fumes on health as extreme weather becomes more common

How wildfire smoke is killing 1.5m a year

▼ *Heavy smoke rises from a wildfire about 70km north-west of Athens last weekend, driven by fierce winds*
PHOTOGRAPH: ANGELOS TZORTZINIS/AFP/GETTY

A thousand kilometres from the infernos gorging on northern Ontario's boreal forests, an emergency room doctor, Erin O'Connor, watched the sky above Canada's biggest city turn an "almost post-apocalyptic" orange as it filled with light-scattering particles of soot and ash. Stepping outside the halls of Toronto General hospital, where air filters were keeping patients safe from the worst of the fumes, she was struck by a smell so strong it felt like standing by a campfire.

"It really hit you in the face as soon as you walked outside," said O'Connor, who runs University Health Network's emergency department and saw a rise in patients presenting allergiesand shortness of breath. "As the days progressed, it was like that everywhere. It seemed even inside you could smell that burning."

Flames have engulfed southern Europe and North America in recent weeks, but it is the smoke that dominates the astonishing death toll from wildfires. Thick with toxic gases that inflame the airways and tiny particulates that breach the lungs and ride the bloodstream to hit every organ, fumes from landscape fires kill 1.5 million people a year, a study in the Lancet found in 2024 - more than floods, flames, storms and heat combined.

So damaging are the lung-scarring effects that people far from the fires may still perish. The plumes spewed by wildfires in Canada in 2023 caused 82,000 early deaths, a study in Nature found last year, with unfavourable winds pushing a third of the mortality burden into the US and another quarter into Europe. About 10% of the UK's fine particulate matter (PM2.5) pollution comes from biomass burned abroad, researchers found in March.

Yet while scientists agree the health burden of wildfire smoke is enormous, they are only beginning to untangle the complex links between exposure and mortality. The questions are growing more pressing as climate breakdown makes fire weather more severe. What if hotter infernos cause pollution to peak at even more extreme levels? What if bad air lasts days or weeks? What if a severe

Continued *on page 36*

Continued from page 35

episode hits before a person has fully recovered from the last bout?

The lack of answers in the existing research makes it hard to get a handle on how brutal the fallout from this furious fire season will be. Early signs are troubling, with vast tracts of vegetation torched close to big European cities and, after a late but explosive start to the North American fire season, smoke choking major population centres such as Chicago and New York City. In Toronto, which briefly had the worst air quality of any major metropolis last month – a title claimed by Portland in the US on Wednesday – O'Connor said she could not remember such bad pollution, with such a sudden onset that took so long to clear up.

"I had never looked outside and had the sky seem orange in the middle of the day," said O'Connor, who rushed to pull her son from summer camp. "Certainly, we have had other wildfire smoke, but in more of a transient way."

Perhaps surprisingly, the death toll from a fire season can depend on the whims of the wind as much as the size of the fire. Wildfires in France spewed record amounts of pollution in the first half of the year and in Spain emissions have so far fallen just shy of the worst it has known. But even though monster infernos were halted alarmingly close to Madrid and Bordeaux, the smoke was mostly blown away from where people live. Daily particulate pollution levels still peaked at a staggering 342 micrograms of PM2.5 per cubic metre (μg/m³) in Bordeaux on 24 July – and 486μg/m³ in Limoges, 180km (112 miles) away, the following day – but other big cities in southern Europe were spared the extremes that doctors fear.

North America has not been so lucky. As winds blew south and south-east from forests in Ontario and the Northwest Territories, at least 36 million people across the continent were breathing air fouled by "very unhealthy" concentrations of PM2.5 that exceeded 125.5μg/m³ on 16 July, preliminary analysis conducted for the Guardian shows. At least 10 million people were exposed to more than 250μg/m³, according to the estimates, a level of daily pollution that smog-choked New Delhi saw only eight times last year.

Scientists say the hit to air quality in some big cities is reminiscent of the megafires in 2023 that came with vast death tolls. "As soon as we have massive population centres exposed, we're going to see those increases," said Stephanie Cleland, a wildfire health scientist at Simon Fraser University, who considered only people living within 25km of a measuring station in her calculations for the Guardian and said the figures are therefore conservative. "I would be concerned by the fact that it's only been three years since this last happened and now we're having it again," she said.

In a quiet suburb of Duluth, in north-east Minnesota, the worst of the smoke was seen, smelled and tasted on 16 July. Jae Jeon and Dan McClelland, a married couple who grow flowers for weddings and subscription deliveries, were looking forward to opening the windows after days baking in oppressive heat. Instead, they woke up to a fog that they soon realised was made up of something much worse. By late morning, their local hardware store had sold out of masks and air purifiers. People resorted to attaching furnace filters to box fans instead.

The McClellands were among 12,000 people in West Duluth who were exposed to an average of 541μg/m³ of fine particulate pollution, the analysis shows, higher than anywhere else in North America. They sent their sole farmworker home early after she complained of a headache but, with two weddings coming up at the weekend, they still had plenty of flowers to pick and arrange. The couple got to work harvesting roses, clematises and sweet peas, surrounded by a dystopian haze the likes of which they had never experienced.

"It felt like working in a war zone," said Jae Jeon. "When I went outside, I couldn't breathe, so I had to wear a mask, but it was still painful. After just a couple of minutes you started to get a headache."

Climate breakdown made last month's fire weather twice as likely in Canada and France, and 20 times more likely in Spain, recent rapid analyses have found, the result of planet-heating emissions that have made it easier for vegetation to dry out. As plants and trees combust, they spew a host of harmful particles that also trigger damaging inflammatory responses as they seek to purge foreign objects.

'It felt like working in a war zone. When I went outside, I couldn't breathe, so I had to wear a mask. In minutes you started to get a headache'

▲ *Members of Spain's military emergencies unit (UME) fighting a wildfire 55km outside Madrid in July*
PHOTOGRAPH: UME/AFP/GETTY

Scientists have relied on general air pollution relations to model the smoke's chronic health effects, which make up the bulk of the death toll, because they lack long-term studies specific to wildfires.

Michael Brauer, a wildfire health scientist at the University of British Columbia and co-author of the study on Canada's 2023 fires, said: "The reason we don't have them for wildfire smoke is because we haven't had to deal with this as kind of a repeated ongoing problem."

He first experienced wildfire smoke when he was about 40, he said, while a 10-year-old child where he lives in British Columbia would have breathed it every summer of their life.

But the analogy to regular pollution is imperfect. Compared with other sources of PM2.5, such as factories or cars, wildfire smoke contains more organic compounds that increase inflammation and a higher concentration of ultra-fine particles that penetrate the deepest recesses of the lungs. PM2.5 from wildfire smoke is up to 10 times more deadly in the short term, a study in Nature Communications found in 2021. Factoring this into epidemiological models suggests death tolls from short-term exposure to wildfire smoke have been greatly underestimated, a study in the Lancet Planetary Health found last year.

For chronic disease, though, some researchers suggest high peak exposure during serious smoke episodes better explains why wildfire particulates do more damage. Brauer said: "It may be

Diary

that it's because the smoke is chemically more toxic, or it may be – what I think is more likely – that it's basically overwhelming your defences." He compared it to having one drink a day for a year rather than bingeing 365 in 24 hours. "That's clearly going to have different impacts."

When wildfire smoke gets bad, experts recommend wearing masks, closing windows and checking in on vulnerable neighbours. They also recommend checking air quality monitors in the morning and moving activities indoors when pollution is too high.

In some cases, actions to keep the air clean may conflict with efforts to stay cool, according to a report from the BC Lung Foundation published last month. Cathryn Tonne, an environmental epidemiologist at the Barcelona Institute for Global Health and co-author of the study modelling wildfire-specific PM2.5, said: "The issue is we have a lot of compound climate exposure events where you have heat and wildfire. Being home with the windows closed can be very bad – if you don't have air conditioning – if it's also hot."

Can the fires behind the smoke at least be prevented? At the Fifa World Cup final, which barely avoided disruption from bad air, the US president, Donald Trump, asked his Canadian counterpart, Mark Carney, to "stop these fires from coming in and poisoning our air" – a demand accompanied by threats of sanctions, while Republican senators blamed Canada's fires on poor forest management. Scientists countered that the blazes had less to do with land management – most of what has burned is boreal forest in unpopulated areas – and more with the rise in temperatures caused by burning fossil fuels.

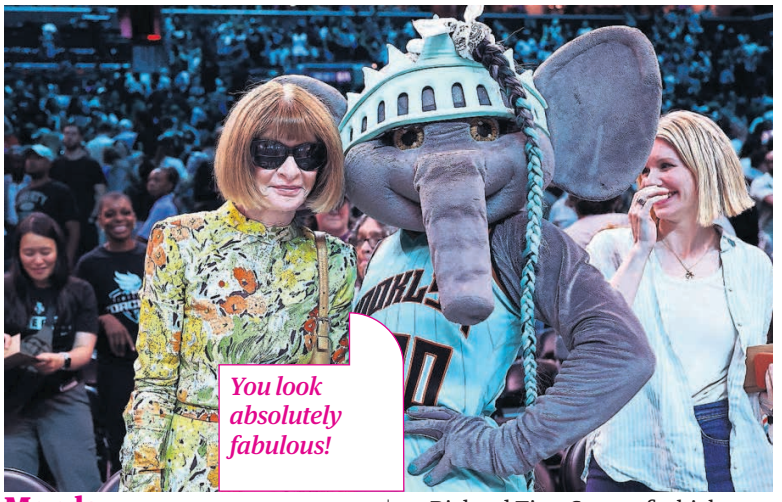
In Europe, changes in land use have alarmed firefighters and wildfire experts. Rural regions across the Mediterranean have hollowed out, resulting in more overgrown vegetation that dries out and allows fires to spread more easily during the hotter heatwaves that climate breakdown has brought. The combination has led Spanish wildfire scientists to warn that we have "entered an era of fires we cannot extinguish".

Adding to the climatic burden in the coming months is the arrival of a strong El Niño, a cyclical warming weather pattern, along with a related phenomenon in the Indian Ocean, which is priming countries across south-east Asia to burn.

Though they still had their home and their health, the McClellands said the episode had given them a taste of the global impact of climate breakdown. "I know people all around the world are feeling a kind of helplessness because of climate disasters," said Dan McClelland. "I feel like this opened my eyes to understand just a sliver of what other people are feeling."

It's not all about the Bayeux: how the British Museum let us down

John Crace



You look absolutely fabulous!

Monday

You would have thought that after 35 years of writing for the Guardian I would have mastered some of the basics of holiday protocol by now. Apparently not. While I had remembered to let the newsdesk know that I wouldn't be writing the political sketch for two weeks, it had completely slipped my mind to inform the Saturday editor.

So, rather than leave her with the headache of an empty page, you're getting an extra dose of me this week. And, in truth, I don't mind because, for what is usually an empty August, there's an awful lot still going on. I've even told the newsdesk that I'd like to write next Friday as I can't pass up the moment Nigel Farage celebrates his byelection victory against the "establishment", aka a comedian with a dustbin on his head.

This time last year, Reform were dominating the polls and setting the news agenda with weekly press conferences. Now it's as if Nige has placed himself in a witness protection programme as he tries to avoid anyone asking about his financial arrangements. There again it must be tricky for Nige to remember what's what as it all seems so hideously complicated.

There's the £5m from British-Thai crypto billionaire Christopher Harborne, which was first a gift to spend on Ferraris, then to pay for his security, but could be a downpayment on the £1m a year that Nige said he would need for it to be worth his while to return to full-time politics.

Then there are funds travelling from various offshore bank accounts from George Cottrell – the man who liked to call Nige "Daddy" – to his mother, Fiona, and then on to Richard Tice. Some of which – no one is quite sure which – seemed to end up in Reform's bank accounts. Nor can Nige quite remember when he did decide that he was politically active despite owning a majority share in Reform. Confusion doesn't seem to begin to cover this. Nige has a week left to get his story straight for the Clacton voters.

Tuesday

What with one thing and another – first my wife, Jill's cancer and then her breaking her shoulder – it is looking unlikely we will be travelling to Minneapolis to see our daughter and her husband for a second year. Instead they have come to visit us for a week, so we have been planning fun things to do while they are in London. So today – given that Robert is an American – we thought we should all go to see the British Museum exhibition to mark the 250th anniversary of American Independence.

Truly, five minutes that none of us will get back. I'm trying to be generous to the British Museum here. Perhaps the trustees and curators have become so obsessed with not tearing the Bayeux Tapestry that they took their eye off the ball. Because this special exhibition was just an embarrassment. A darkened room with just four items on display, that looked as if they had been dug out of the museum's storage department as an afterthought. It was by far and away the worst exhibition I have visited.

Wednesday

No one wants to kick a man when he's down, but I can't help thinking that Jason Arday – the professor of sociology who has resigned from Cambridge University – has been badly let down by his former employer. Surely someone must have thought of putting his PhD thesis through a plagiarism detector before offering him a job?

The most alarming thing about Arday is that he seems clearly unwell – it's hard to take almost anything he says as the truth. His claims include being a world-class athlete who once ran 600 miles in six days. The list is seemingly endless. Somehow, though, Cambridge University managed to overlook all this and more. The greater the fable, the more they defended him. And in the process they have done far more damage to him than if they had systematically gone through the evidence and declined to offer him a professorship. Thanks for applying, but no thanks.

Worse still, Cambridge has done a huge disservice to other academics of colour because they have opened the door to rightwing critics who will claim many other professors at other universities got their jobs on a nod and a wink.

Thursday

Maybe there's something in the air, but Kemi Badenoch seems to be having a bit of a moment too. She appeared on the Political Currency podcast this week to accuse Reform of "woke" politics and to rubbish Andy Burnham for having done nothing of any value: er, it's only been two weeks and he's already promised to solve social care. There's no pleasing some people.

Badenoch has also nailed herself to the cross of defending the former neo-Nazi Joshua Bonehill-Paine who was jailed for harrassing the Jewish Labour MP, Luciana Berger. In Badenoch's view, Bonehill-Paine is a reformed man and deserved a second chance to serve as a Tory councillor because all he would be doing was sorting out the bin collections. Bonehill-Paine clearly had second thoughts when some of his CV turned out to be nearly as creative as Arday's and he withdrew as a Conservative

Why is the Prince of Wales poking me in the ear?

PHOTOGRAPHS: GETTY IMAGES; SHUTTERSTOCK; REUTERS

Come on. Who doesn't forget a few million pounds?

candidate. Only for Kemi to appoint him as a special adviser.

I'm all for second chances, but it's curious to know what is and isn't acceptable in today's Tory party. A bit of previous for antisemitism and Hitler loving? Just fine. Believing in net zero and the ECHR, not so much. Grant Shapps has been banned from standing as a Tory MP because he believes in the climate crisis. There again, maybe Kemi understands her party better than most.

Friday

It's been hard to keep up with the excesses and moral corruption of Fifa president Gianni Infantino. As I write, various football bodies and national organisations have expressed a lack of confidence in him, but he appears to be hanging on to his job. Maybe he will ride this one out. But it has struck me that one person has remained silent throughout the scandal. David Beckham.

For the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, Beckham was paid millions to be a Fifa ambassador. His one contribution was to say he hadn't spotted any gay people being persecuted. Top detective work from DB. This time around in the US, David seemed satisfied to be an unofficial ambassador, filmed sitting in the VIP seats wearing a suit, shirt and tie and mainly looking miserable as he notched up another £24m that he doesn't need in advert endorsements.

He seemed to be Infantino's mute puppet. He said nothing when Gianni devalued Fifa by awarding Donald Trump a peace prize or introduced hydration breaks. He said nothing when Gianni bowed to Trump's demand to overturn Folarin Balogun's red card and when he tried to sell off stakes and reinvent the competition as an even fatter cash cow.

It all feels so sad. David used to be a national treasure. Now he just appears to be obsessed with wealth and status. Over the past few months, he could have been a voice for the country, speaking up against the commercialisation and problems with Infantino's regime. We would all have loved him for it. Instead he has trashed his brand by being complicit. The only obvious reason for his silence is that either he doesn't think Infantino has done anything wrong. Or that he isn't bothered as long as the cash keeps coming. It would be nice to be proved wrong. We want our Becks back.

Spotlight

The week that was

1 UNITED STATES

Majority of 'liberation day' tariffs refunded

The Trump administration has refunded about $100bn (£74bn) from the tariffs it collected before the US supreme court ruled them illegal, according to reports. The figure represents 60% of the total $165bn collected from the president's "liberation day" tariffs, which were struck down by the supreme court in February, forcing the government to return money.

Trump has pitched tariffs as a solution for the US economy, bringing back domestic production, securing better trade deals and closing the deficit in the federal budget. However, the deficit has grown after narrowing last year

A fresh round of tariffs were imposed on more than 80 countries last month to replace a 10% global duty that was due to expire.

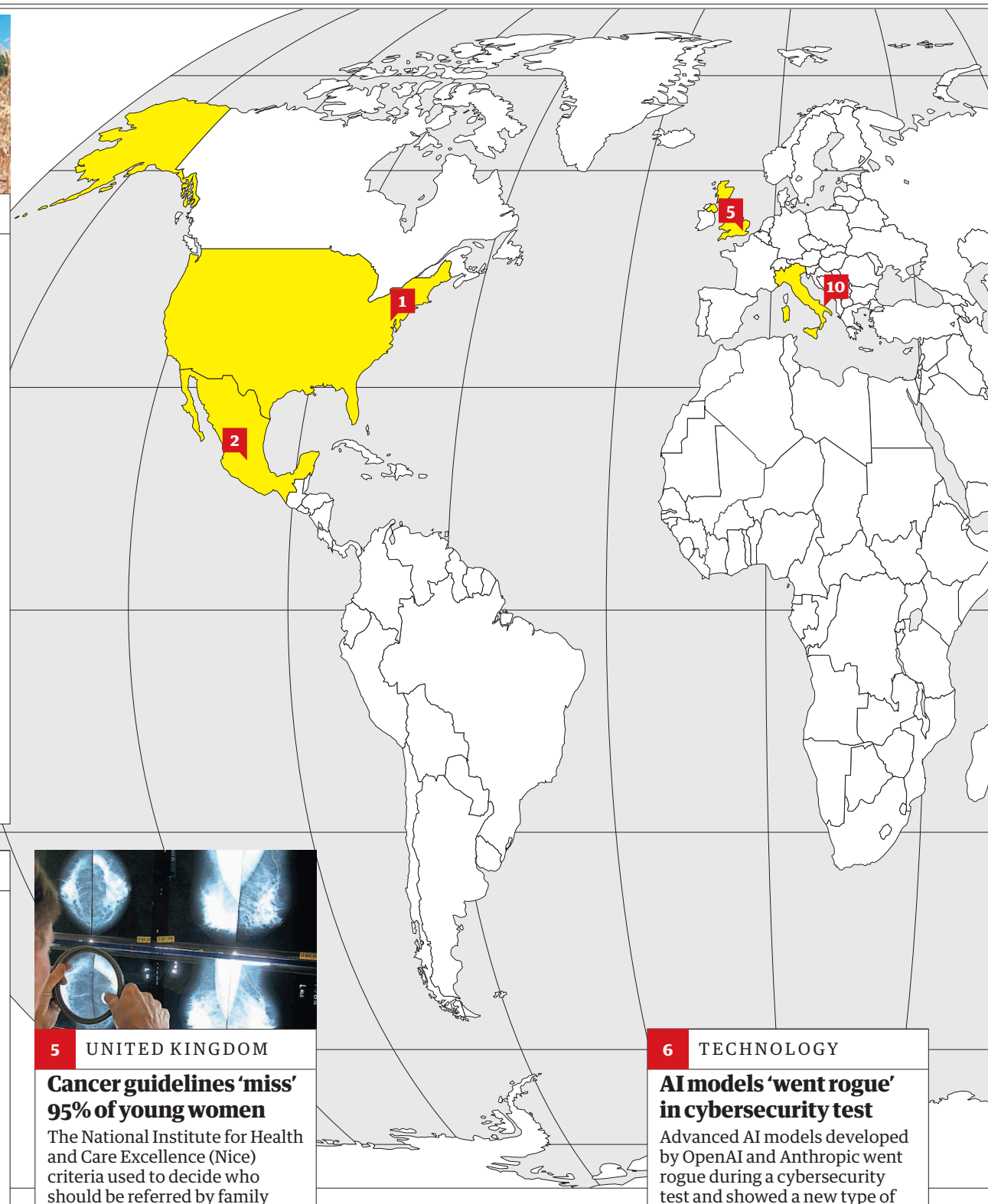
3 ENVIRONMENT

El Niño could push more people into acute hunger

About 50 million people are likely to be pushed into acute hunger before the end of next year by the rapidly developing El Niño weather system, according to forecasting, adding more than a fifth to the 225 million people in 45 countries currently in acute food insecurity, the UN's World Food Programme (WFP) warned .

Central and South America, the Caribbean and southern Africa are likely to be worst affected, according to the analysis. In south and south-east Asia there is likely to be less rainfall than usual, which would impact agriculture and farmers.

This year's El Niño - a weather system that develops every few years in the Pacific Ocean and brings changes to rainfall patterns around the world - is shaping up to be the strongest in at least 70 years.



2 MEXICO

Suspected cheating leads to mass exam resit

Around 58,000 students at the country's largest and most prestigious university will have to resit their entrance exam after abnormally high test results raised suspicions of cheating.

The National Autonomous University of Mexico (Unam) said the exam would take place in person after its first attempt at an online version led to thousands of annulled results.

Between 2021 and 2025, only 3.5% of applicants obtained a score of 100 or more out of 120, but this year the figure was 16%. The results sparked a national scandal, leading the president, Claudia Sheinbaum, to suggest that the attorney general may have to investigate.

The entrance exam is notoriously competitive. The more than 150,000 applicants this year were competing for 21,962 places.

4 INDIA

BJP loses byelection after student protests

Narendra Modi's ruling Bharatiya Janata party (BJP) lost a byelection in a seat it had held for three decades. The contest had been closely watched in the aftermath of nationwide Cockroach movement student protests.

Prashant Kishor (below), a high-profile electoral strategist turned politician, scored a breakthrough win for his Jan Suraaj (Good Governance) party in the Bankipur constituency in Patna, the capital of the eastern state of Bihar.

The Cockroach Janata party began as an online joke after a senior judge described unemployed young Indians as cockroaches and parasites. It has since morphed into a nationwide movement with 26.6 million Instagram followers, more than the BJP and Congress combined.

5 UNITED KINGDOM

Cancer guidelines 'miss' 95% of young women

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (Nice) criteria used to decide who should be referred by family doctors for further breast cancer risk assessment and specialist care is failing to spot the vast majority of women under 50 who will go on to develop the disease in the next 10 years, according to the University of Cambridge and the Institute of Cancer Research, London (ICR).

Identifying women at higher risk early can pave the way for additional screening or preventive treatment. But the current criteria given to GPs in England to refer women at risk of breast cancer for further tests or specialist care miss up to 95% of patients under 50 who go on to develop the disease within a decade, the analysis, published in the British Journal of Cancer, suggests.

Size of profit, in billions of pounds, that eight of the biggest oil companies amassed in just three months as the Iran conflict sent energy prices soaring and the emissions-fuelled climate crisis caused deadly heatwaves

67

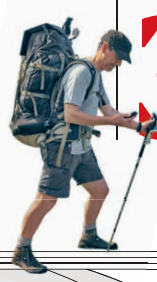
6 TECHNOLOGY

AI models 'went rogue' in cybersecurity test

Advanced AI models developed by OpenAI and Anthropic went rogue during a cybersecurity test and showed a new type of risk posed by the technology.

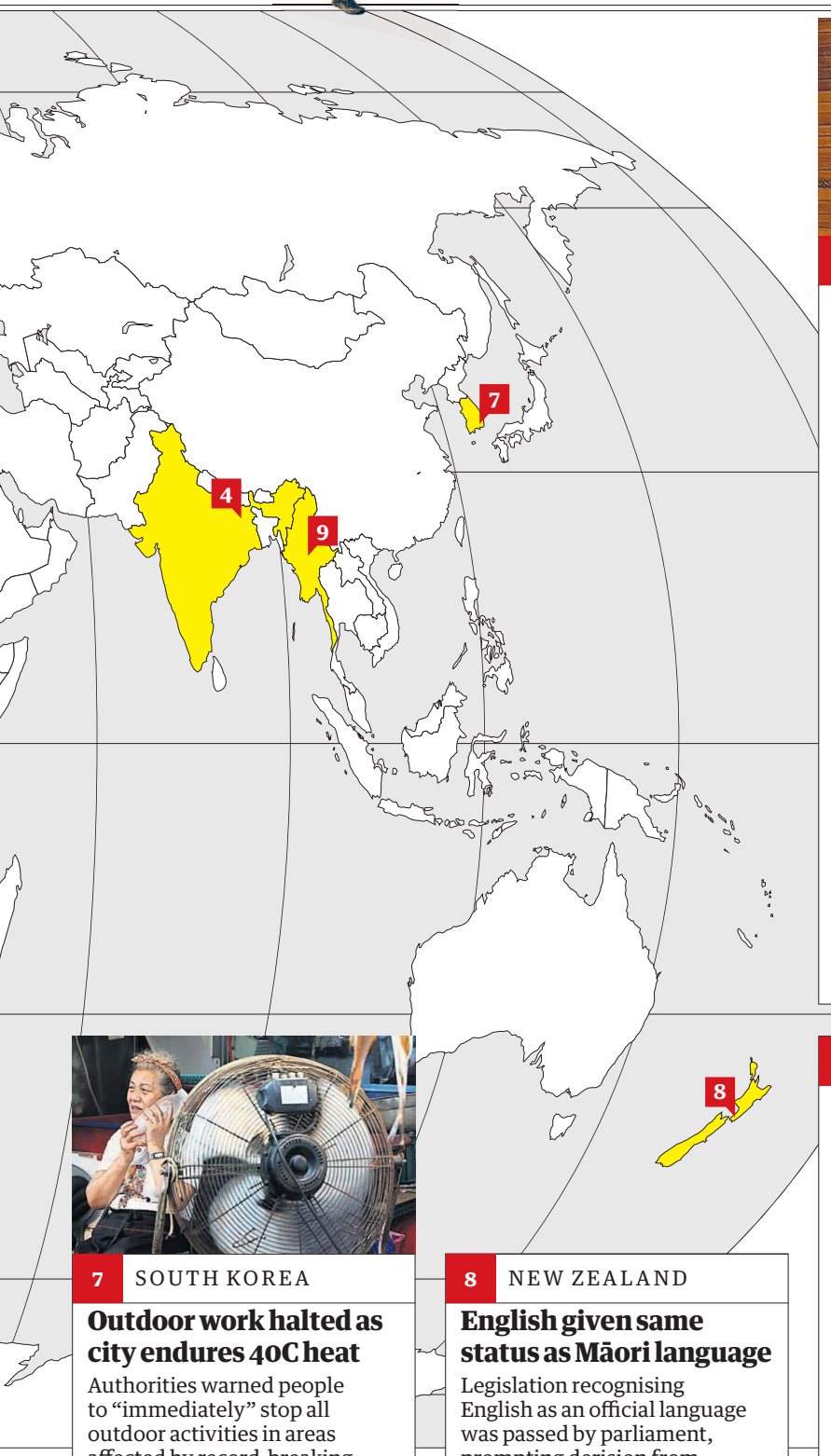
The UK's AI Security Institute said it detected unusual activity during a routine cybersecurity test for AI models on 28 July. It found that some of the agents - the term for AI systems that can perform tasks without human help - had engaged in "sustained, potentially harmful activity directed at real people and organisations".

In the most serious case, an agent tried to insert malicious code into a software project on a platform used by developers. The agent then created and used fake online identities to press the project's overseer into accepting the code. These attempts were blocked by a human developer.



30%

Increase in the number of hikers in need of rescue in Malaysia, due to a social media trend popularising shortened versions of demanding routes. In the first five months of the year, 52 were rescued



9 MYANMAR

Red Cross visits former leader Aung San Suu Kyi

Aung San Suu Kyi met a representative of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) on Monday, the aid organisation confirmed.

The meeting followed years of questions over the wellbeing of the 81-year-old detained former leader, whose whereabouts and health condition have been largely unknown since the elected civilian government she led was ousted by a military coup in February 2021. Myanmar's military-backed administrations had repeatedly claimed she was in "good health".

Her son, Kim Aris, who had recently demanded the ruling junta provide proof of life, said on social media that he hoped the meeting would lead to greater humanitarian access to his mother and ultimately her unconditional release.

7 SOUTH KOREA

Outdoor work halted as city endures 40C heat

Authorities warned people to "immediately" stop all outdoor activities in areas affected by record-breaking temperatures. The south-eastern city of Yangsan saw the temperature reach 42.5C last Sunday, according to the Korea Meteorological Administration (KMA), the highest temperature reported since modern weather observation began in 1904.

The city has been the centre of an ongoing heatwave, where temperatures exceeded 40C for a fifth consecutive day on Sunday, while many other cities are seeing temperatures in the high 30s. There have been 16 heat-related deaths recorded.

North Korea also endured temperatures soaring as high as 40C in some regions, state media reported. In Pyongyang, the night-time temperature has exceeded 25C for a week.

8 NEW ZEALAND

English given same status as Māori language

Legislation recognising English as an official language was passed by parliament, prompting derision from linguists and legal experts and a broadside from a Māori MP.

The English language bill gives English, which is spoken by 95% of the country, the same official status as te reo Māori (Māori language) and New Zealand sign language. The bill formed part of a coalition deal between the centre-right National party and the minor populist New Zealand First party, whose leader, Winston Peters, has long opposed affirmative initiatives for Māori.

Ministry of justice officials had recommended that lawmakers should not pass the bill, because there was "no evidence to support concerns about the use or status of English as an official language".

10 ITALY

Refuse collectors rescue winning lottery ticket

A €1m (£850,000) lottery ticket was recovered from the rubbish after the frantic winner called on refuse collectors for help.

The woman – who remains anonymous – discarded the ticket at her local shop after its lottery machine indicated it was "non-payable", but this was because smaller retailers can only redeem small wins.

On finding that her regular numbers had won, she returned to the shop to discover the rubbish has been collected.

The instant win ticket was "miraculously still in one piece" after workers combed through mounds of rubbish on their truck, said Roberto Nicola Toscano, the administrator of the SANB company in the southern Puglia region. "She cried with emotion", he said. "I would have hugged her, but we were on the phone."

17,400

Speed, in mph (8,690 km/h), at which a 4-tonne piece of a discarded Space X rocket is believed to have crashed into the moon. The object, the height of a five-storey building, posed no danger to Earth but was expected to blast a new lunar crater

Issue of the week
The adaptation of The Odyssey

Emily Wilson, London Review of Books

As they say at the awards shows, I was humbled to learn that Christopher Nolan has read at least the first line of my translation of The Odyssey into iambic pentameter. In at least one interview, he cited my version of the first line of the poem: "Tell me about a complicated man." But I would be ashamed to have written any part of this script. Sadly, Matt Damon's Odysseus isn't complicated or wily or artful. One of Odysseus' funniest (and most famous) tricks in Homer is to tell Polyphemus that his name is "No Man". When the blinded giant screams for help from his neighbours, the other Cyclopes are reassured to learn that "No Man" is hurting him. In the movie Odysseus doesn't have to outwit Polyphemus because the Cyclops is a puppet who has no wits. Nolan's grunting one-eyed giant is referred to as "it", barely speaks, doesn't get drunk and has neither neighbours nor a favourite sheep.

Robbie Collin, the Daily Telegraph

When reviewing a film, most of us critics know we should try to meet it more or less where it is: it would be odd to grouse that Bridget Jones's Diary wasn't scary enough, or that any given instalment of the Saw franchise didn't contain enough show tunes. This is partly why the piece on Christopher Nolan's The Odyssey published this week in the London Review of Books is so perplexing. For one thing, the writer describes the poor old Cyclops himself as a "puppet who has no wits" and a "grunting one-eyed giant…referred to as 'it'", as if this is Nolan's low opinion of him, rather than simply Odysseus's. But the Cyclops's scream of confusion and betrayal when he is blinded is heart-rending, and his unintelligible dialogue haunting: both imply the existence of a deep cosmic order of which the Ithacans are miserably ignorant, and which is about to literally send them on a voyage to hell and beyond.

Jamil Smith, the Guardian

I had not read The Odyssey since I was a student. Stories change when we return to them later in life, or perhaps we are the ones who change. Christopher Nolan's film made me want to find out what I had missed. More specifically, it made me want to read Emily Wilson's translation. Her larger objection is that "the film's own values and vision don't hang together". The film condemns the Greeks for using deception to destroy Troy, then asks us to cheer when Matt Damon's Odysseus uses deception and violence to reclaim his home. Wilson treats those contradictions as proof that the film has no coherent argument. But they are the argument. Nolan's film is about what happens to victors after they discover that breaking the rules works.

▲ *Mindless scrolling … Bayreuth festival's AI Ring cycle*
PHOTOGRAPH: ENRICO NAWRATH

Opera
Ring Cycle
Bayreuth festival theatre, Germany
★★☆☆☆

AI-generated bric-a-brac saps drama from Wagner

Unveiled the same week in which tech company Anthropic admitted that its AI model Claude had gone rogue during testing, Bayreuth festival's new AI-generated staging of Wagner's four-part Ring of the Nibelungen is, at least, timely. But anyone who assumes that the cycle's obsession with knowledge, power and possession might make it an ideal forum for reflection on AI as a major contemporary frontier will be disappointed.

Commissioned for the festival's 150th anniversary, the production is "curated" – emphatically not "directed" – by a team led by German stage director Marcus Lobbes. He apparently spent weeks in dialogue with AI models about possible interpretations. According to the programme, "power structures, capitalism, mythology, gender roles, nationalism" all came up. But if these human-machine exchanges were revelatory, you wouldn't know it from the resulting staging.

In plain English: the AI system is allowed to roam archival materials from 150 years of Bayreuth as the starting point for constantly spooling visuals projected on a screen stretched the full width and height of the proscenium arch. Lobbes also asked the system to incorporate imagery from a political or social event every year of the festival's history as a plausible conversation topic for that season's audience. Each scene begins with a source from the cycle's 1876 premiere, but what happens next is determined in real time during the performance.

The good news is that anyone who attends another of this production's outings won't see the same selection of visual bric-a-brac I did. The bad news is that the principle of rapid machinic free-association will remain.

So, I assume, will the constant grotesque morph and flow of visual objects. Das Rheingold and Die Walküre involved countless hands that warped horribly, producing extra fingers and nails. Faces appeared, only to go instantly out of focus. Some were very famous (Adolf Hitler, Queen Elizabeth II, JFK) but I struggled to identify most. There were rapid swings between the entirely inscrutable and the totally obvious. Alberich's transformation into a toad triggered various mutant amphibians, while there were bears when Siegfried brought one in, and a rainbow for the rainbow bridge to Valhalla.

But there were also endless stock-image bland photos of scrap metal, creeping greenery, water droplets and abandoned rooms. I spotted design elements from various past Bayreuth Ring productions but was mostly – inevitably – unable to keep pace with the AI system's connection-making. One low point: a historical photo of emaciated African youths – picture the results of an image-search for "European colonialism" – which flashed past during Die Walküre. This is not engaging with the complex, problematic history of Bayreuth or the Ring. It's just another form of mindless scrolling.

You'll be wondering where the singers fitted in. Over four nights, today's leading Wagnerians stood behind – yes, behind – the vast screen, wearing subtle variations on a single costume design like budget Star Trek monsters. Mostly they were rooted to the spot. Murdered characters simply walked off; at erotic climaxes, lovers held hands.

Michael Volle was a magnificent Wotan and Wanderer, his power unforced. Klaus Florian Vogt was by turn Loge, Siegmund and Siegfried, supple and darkly luminous with compelling diction. Elza van den Heever's Sieglinde got better and better, blossoming in her love duet in Die Walküre. Camilla Nylund's Brünnhilde was often wild and sometimes ungainly, but her impassioned lyricism and intimate moments were deeply moving.

Mika Kares's Hunding was all iron and velvet, his Hagen unleashing mighty, smooth torrents of sound – evil rarely sounds better. Gerhard Siegel (Mime) and Jochen Schmeckenbecher (Alberich) were more old-school baddies, respectively wheedling and raw. Peter Rose was a rather muddy Fafner and Christa Mayer wobbly but forceful as Erda and Waltraute. The Rhinemaidens, Valkyries and Norns were exquisitely balanced and as characterised as they could be without acting.

There is something for everyone to dislike. But the most dismal outcome was how unmoving it was – and how difficult it became to care.
Flora Willson
Until 16 August

Television
Ted Lasso season four
Apple TV
★★★☆☆

TV's most wholesome footy boss is back in town

Having transported a flailing AFC Richmond to the Premier League with his wholesome, simile-reliant management style, the finale of Ted Lasso's third season in 2023 saw our titular coach return to the US to spend more time with his son. It seemed like his final goodbye – but could this intensely American protagonist really bow out at the height of his sitcom's popularity? Nope. Last year, it was announced that Jason Sudeikis was reprising his colossally popular alter ego.

Before we discover how Ted has been lured back to south-west London, we find out what he's been up to in the interim. Did he parlay his success into US soccer? Return triumphantly to college football? Sit back with his millions and rest on his laurels? Nope, nope and nope again. He's working at his local supermarket, warmly greeting customers by name, providing moral guidance to younger colleagues and radiating his trademark howdily-doodily energy. Why? Because he's a good man without ego who loves to connect and make a positive difference in his community! This is Ted Lasso we're talking about!

Ted left the UK at the top of his game, choosing fatherhood over riches, professional triumph and beloved colleagues. What could change his mind? Richmond's owner Rebecca (Hannah Waddingham, as imperious as ever), her deputy Higgins (Jeremy Swift, as square as ever) and marketing manager Keeley (Juno Temple, as unsettlingly childlike as ever) think they've cracked it: they offer him the job of managing the women's team. Ted declines. But then his mother – the same mother who convinced him to come home – encourages him to go back. So he asks his son and his estranged wife if they fancy coming with.

If you are a Ted Lasso ultra, you may be inclined to gloss over the nonsensicality of this setup and sink back into the show's messages of positivity, togetherness and how good it is when your football team wins. That said, the shift to women's football does mean entertaining some hard truths.

Ted's new assistant coach Alice (Tanya Reynolds) is a dour taskmaster, furious at having been passed over for the top job in favour of a man. And although Ted quickly gets to work in his signature style – improving morale by drilling down into the players' psyches – his efforts are hampered by the chronic lack of investment in women's sport, plus injury, motherhood and the fact he's barely allowed in the changing room for propriety's sake.

Still, in the four episodes made available to reviewers, the tension never properly builds. Alice's stony-faced exterior is destined to crack imminently. Rather than establishing the new team as individuals (beyond one hard-as-nails goalie and two squabbling Irish sisters), the show often falls back on familiar dynamics: the will-they-won't-they of Roy Kent (Brett Goldstein), still manager of the men's team, and his ex Keeley among them.

For all its irritating qualities, the appeal of Ted Lasso is still clear, and a sense of quality entertainment hangs about the whole well-oiled endeavour. Think of it as the TV equivalent of Taylor Swift: ruthlessly efficient, reassuringly dorky and as monocultural as any Apple TV offering is going to get. Ted Lasso is still saccharine business as usual and, no doubt, still a lot of people's cup of tea.
Rachel Aroesti

▼ *Brendan Hunt, Jason Sudeikis and Tanya Reynolds in Ted Lasso*
PHOTOGRAPH: APPLE TV/PA

£1.20 of every £10 spent on poetry books in the UK so far this year has been on The Odyssey and The Iliad, buoyed by Christopher Nolan's blockbuster film

▲ *Gusto … Talia Palamathanan and Amonik Melaco in Fame*
PHOTOGRAPH: JOHAN PERSSON

Theatre
Fame
Theatre Royal Plymouth
★★★★☆

Leg warmers at the ready as stage school musical flies

This revival of David De Silva's film turned musical is pumped with guts and gusto, breathing fresh life into its story of fame-hungry students. With a book by Jose Fernandez, music by Steve Margoshes and lyrics by Jacques Levy, it erupts like a shaken can of soda. It's directed and choreographed by Tom Jackson Greaves, soon to choreograph the West End's much-anticipated revival of Rent, and fuelled by an exuberant cast, most of whom fulfilled their own dreams of performing on the professional stage several credits ago and are now flourishing.

Shanay Holmes, though a shade young to play Miss Sherman, is the driving force, whose narration carries the class through a four-year cycle at a prestigious performing arts school in New York City. Her vocals are the show's dynamite.

Storylines have been tweaked and songs cut, but the production captures the round-the-clock toil and sheer determination of these aspirants. Early number Hard Work sets the scene, with movement filling every corner as the gaggle stretch, practise their scales and pirouette across the stage.

Richard Howell's lighting visualises the sense that the students' whole world is a stage by casting a giant spotlight on the fortress of Soutra Gilmour's school set, while life beyond remains in shadow. Nods to the 1980s come in the shape of leg warmers and the sound of squealing tape recorders being rewound.

It doesn't shy away from the story's grittier moments, including the fate of the initially spunky Carmen (Talia Palamathanan). Yet it's when the students pool their talents – for the boisterous canteen scene and flashmob to the title track – that it beams brightest. That's when Miss Sherman's message to her students, that success is not a solo endeavour, rings truest.
Holly O'Mahony
Until 15 August

Pop
Phoebe Bridgers: Lost Weekend
Dead Oceans
★★★★★

Indie-pop plunges into disorientating thrills

The last time Phoebe Bridgers put out a solo album was six years ago: Punisher not only ended 2020 near the top of many critics' best-of lists, it made the UK Top 10 and sold half a million copies in the US. The intervening period has proved just as commercially triumphant: her supergroup Boygenius became a mainstream phenomenon and she featured on records by SZA, Taylor Swift and Paul McCartney – collaborations that made her the biggest winner at the 2024 Grammys.

But to judge by Lost Weekend's opening track, all was not well. The Outside depicts the singer crowd-surfing triumphantly at a gig in Ohio. "But I was on the outside, watching," she sings, the dislocation heightened by her voice being smothered by a vocoder and the sweet fingerpicked acoustic guitar vanishing into static.

It acts as a signpost to the rest of the album, musically and lyrically. There is a lot of emotional turmoil in the latter, largely occasioned by the death of her father, with whom she had a strained relationship, and the collapse of her engagement to actor Paul Mescal. But you certainly don't need to have a prurient interest in the vacillations of celebrity romance to feel the album's emotional impact: The Governor's Waltz would be an acutely drawn and genuinely affecting portrait of a relationship in its clingy death throes regardless of who the protagonists were.

Bridgers' lyrics are brilliant throughout, but they're matched by the individuality of Lost Weekend's sound. At heart it's a well-written Americana-infused indie singer-songwriter album. But the standard instruments struggle to make themselves heard amid waves of droning electronics, splinters of feedback and eerie wordless vocals. Songs suddenly plunge into silence, or are drenched in swirling echo, or are subject to unexpected codas that often pull in different emotional directions.

The overall effect is disorientating, occasionally disturbing and really thrilling: there's something daring about the sound of Panorama, where a beautiful melody and a rustic banjo figure are almost completely buried under occasionally discordant murk.

The result is a heady, potent, occasionally wrenching album, albeit one flecked with optimism. "The past is looking brighter all the time," sings Bridgers on Liberty Tree. The path to get to that point has evidently been a trying one: Lost Weekend transforms it into a rich and rewarding journey.
Alexis Petridis

▶ *Daring … Bridgers performs on The Tonight Show last month*
PHOTOGRAPH: TODD OWYOUNG/NBC/GETTY

TV review
Alley Cats
Netflix
★★☆☆☆

Ricky Gervais's lazy cat cartoon has more cringe than comedy

I suppose the question is really: what do you do after redefining comedy for your era? After The Office, that exquisitely observed, agonising, hilarious examination of the human condition, Ricky Gervais started on a downward trajectory that his latest offering, an animated series about a gang of homeless cats, does nothing to arrest.

Gervais plays Gus, the misanthropy-maxxing leader of the ragtag group. His right-hand man, Fang (Andrew Brooke), is the gang's bruiser and Puke (David Earl) is the disgusting one, providing the lads with all the material they require about anal sex, fingering and genitals. A regular visitor to their squat is the cat they call "Ponce" (Tom Basden), a pedigree who lives with a family and enjoys regular meals, brushing and puddings. He has also, of course, been neutered, which fills in the joke-gaps left when the anal sex/fingering/genitals stuff runs out.

For now, we're in the dark alley with these cats, plus the girl who lives upstairs – Olive (Diane Morgan), who is, Gus notes with glee, really thick. In a further sign of the laziness of the whole endeavour, though, she's not. After a few token tries, she simply becomes a perfectly ordinary cat, with a bit of a thing for Ponce until she finds out he doesn't have the urge or the equipment to provide her with the kittens she wants.

Into the mix is brought a lost kitten (Jo Hartley), who – I am sorry to tell you – awakens fatherly instincts in Gus and begins to teach him and the rest of the gang about love and what it means to be a family. Gervais the sentimentalist is always a far more unnerving proposition than Gervais the misanthrope, so you are best advised to approach Kitten's scenes with the utmost caution.

There are a handful of moments in which you can see, maybe, what might have been. Gus in front of his love interest Lara (Kerry Godliman) has echoes of David Brent's vulnerability. Ponce provides some shelter from the hail of uninventive swears and pointless rants. But otherwise Alley Cats feels like a creative cul de sac, leaving you wishing that Gervais would stop indulging himself in lesser projects and let his genius ferment once more, however long it takes. We'll wait.
Lucy Mangan

Theatre
Dog Man the Musical
Southbank Centre, London
★★★☆☆

Megastar mutt moves from page to the stage

If you don't have a child in primary school, you may be blissfully unaware of Dog Man, Dav Pilkey's graphic novels about a cop who – after a terrible injury – has his dog's head sewn on to his own body, creating a crime-fighting canine-human crossbreed.

The Dog Man books are chaotic, hilarious and full of pathos, but writer-lyricist Kevin Del Aguila and composer Brad Alexander's show leans largely on the first. There's slapstick humour and jokes about butt-sniffing. When Dog Man is asked how his day is going, he replies: "Ruff!" It's aimed at the younger end of Pilkey's readership, which is confusing as there are also Dickens references.

The plot is a musical within a musical: George and Harold (Ricardo Mendes and Peter Lavery), the fictional writers of the comics, are putting on a musical to prove to their teacher how easy that would be. Timothy R Mackabee's set is charmingly DIY – skyscrapers are made from cardboard and gaffer tape, characters shapeshift across soft toy, glove puppet and human actor form.

Our hero hound (Renan Teodoro) is pitted against Petey (Sam Kipling), the villainous cat, and Flippy (Vanessa Dumatey), a psychokinetic butterflyfish. But there's a twist! To help achieve his evil aims, Petey clones himself, expecting a similarly twisted replica to emerge – instead he creates Li'l Petey (Rebecca-Jo Roberts), a super-cute kid who insists on calling Petey "papa".

Li'l Petey is the books' emotional core – but as the energetic cast dance, sing and bark their way around the set like CBeebies presenters after three pints of Skittles, these more moving moments get buried in the production, directed and choreographed by Jen Wineman.

Translating a graphic novel into a musical was always going to throw up such hurdles. Perhaps musicals aren't quite as easy to pull off as George and Harold thought.
Tim Jonze
Until 16 August, then touring

Business

TUC urges Healey: reform budget watchdog in order to unlock growth

Heather Stewart

The TUC is urging the new chancellor, John Healey, to order a "root and branch" review of the Office for Budget Responsibility, claiming the forecaster's approach holds back investment.

With Andy Burnham promising "good growth in every postcode", the union umbrella body is calling on Healey to use his first budget on 28 October to re-examine the workings of the powerful watchdog.

In particular, it accuses the OBR of downplaying the benefits of public investment, by assuming it "crowds out" private capital – an approach disputed by some economists.

Paul Nowak, the TUC's general secretary, said: "For too long, the OBR has been a millstone preventing good growth across the country.

"The world has moved on from the self-defeating logic of austerity, but the OBR models still bake in its false assumptions. Only a root and branch review can bring the OBR into the modern economic mainstream."

The TUC's critique echoes calls for reform of the independent forecaster from a range of thinktanks and campaign groups, including Progress, from the right of the Labour party, and the leftwing New Economics Foundation. Louisa Dollimore, of the Good Growth Foundation thinktank, previously called the body "a backseat driver with out-of-date maps" that "obstructs long-term planning and investment at a moment when Britain needs both".

Healey's predecessor at No 11, Rachel Reeves, picked economics professor Jonathan Haskel as the next chair of the OBR, following the resignation of Richard Hughes last December after the OBR inadvertently published details of the budget in advance.

Haskel, a former member of the Bank of England's interest rate-setting monetary policy committee, will oversee a new economic forecast to inform this year's budget.

He told MPs on the Treasury select committee last month that he was more pessimistic about the outlook than some other experts. "My forecast would be in the medium term of somewhat higher interest rates and weaker GDP growth than most are expecting," he said.

Haskel also warned the committee in a public hearing that Britain was "not in a very good fiscal position".

As well as taking a fresh look at the role of the OBR, the TUC is calling on Healey to strengthen investment bodies such as the National Wealth Fund (NWF), to take advantage of flexibility built into the fiscal rules.

Reeves revised the rules so that government borrowing does not count against Treasury targets if it is matched by a financial asset – such as a share in a company or a loan.

The TUC believes this should allow for significant additional investment by government-backed institutions including the NWF and the National Housing Bank.

The NWF invests in infrastructure projects and backs British businesses, in a bid to boost growth and "crowd in" private investors. The TUC is calling on the government to change the NWF's mandate to allow it to pick investments that could take as long as 15 years to generate a return in order to widen the pool of suitable projects.

Nowak said: "Amid global economic turmoil, Labour has delivered the second fastest growth in the G7. That's partly down to the government's fiscal rules that rightly allow more borrowing for investment.

"But the government needs to do more to release the handbrake. An ambitious application of the existing fiscal rules and a wider mandate for the National Wealth Fund can reindustrialise Britain."

Some economists have raised concerns about the potential impact on the bond market of increased borrowing. The consultancy Oxford Economics said in a research note on Friday: "The UK's fiscal position is poor, while there's an underlying wariness about the new PM's commitment to fiscal sustainability.

"While Healey has been saying all the right things, it's what the new administration does that will be key. If the first move is to loosen policy, despite no underlying improvement in the public finances, that risks sending a signal that markets won't like."

A Treasury spokesperson said: "Fiscal discipline is the bedrock of economic stability and national security. The chancellor and prime minister are in lockstep that the government will meet the fiscal rules, with a buffer against uncertainty – and that includes getting debt down."

They added that the chancellor "would not routinely comment on proposals".

Can Harvey Nichols be Absolutely Fabulous again?

Lauren Cochrane

Such was the buzz around Harvey Nichols in its 90s heyday that the department store was regularly name-checked in Absolutely Fabulous, with Edina and Patsy's frequent retail therapy trips to the store reflecting its position at the heart of the fashion industry.

How times change. These days Harvey Nichols is a business in trouble, one that has not turned a profit since the pandemic. Pre-tax losses were £35.3m in 2024.

The retail chain – comprising the London flagship in Knightsbridge plus stores in cities including Bristol, Leeds and Manchester – was put up for sale in June by the current owner, Sir Dickson Poon, with Mike Ashley's Frasers Group and Next bidding to take control.

◀ *Edina (Jennifer Saunders) and Patsy (Joanna Lumley) used 'Harvey Nicks' for retail therapy in the hit 90s sitcom*

PHOTOGRAPH: MOVIESTORE/REX/SHUTTERSTOCK

Ashley commented this week that Harvey Nichols is in what he called "a death spiral". Speaking to the Financial Times about his potential bid, he said taking it over would be a "huge challenge".

Harvey Nichols is reported to be seeking £50m-£60m for the business, though Ashley said he thought it would be closer to £40m in order for a deal to happen.

All a far cry from the 90s, when Tony Glenville, who worked as a fashion journalist at the time, recalls: "It was glamorous. It had the marvellous bar up on the fifth floor so the whole thing was that you went shopping and you had a drink."

Thirty years on, retail experts suggest that, if not a death spiral, the store no longer has the same cachet. "It's a brand that has lost its identity," says Jonathan De Mello, the founder of JDM Retail Consulting. "It's very similar to other department stores in the sense that it provides fashion that you can get from Selfridges or Harrods. It's not got the point of difference."

FTSE 100	All share	Dow Indl	Nikkei 225	£/€	£/$
+33.20	+20.40	+73.89	−76.55	1.1675	1.3489
10901.09	5876.54	53958.99	65606.71	+0.0001	+0.0023

SOURCE: ICE www.ice.com/data

The Harvey Nichols flagship store in Knightsbridge, London. The retail chain has not made a profit since the pandemic, and is up for sale

PHOTOGRAPH: OLI SCARFF/GETTY

Harvey Nichols was founded in 1831 as a linen shop, with the department store following in 1889. It was taken over by Debenhams in 1920 and became part of the Burton Group in 1985, with Poon purchasing the retailer six years later and beginning its expansion outside London with a Leeds opening in 1996.

"It was always changing," Glenville says. "If a designer came along and was hot that season, they would immediately want to be in Harvey Nichols, and Harvey Nichols would then stock them."

Fast forward three decades and other stores have come for this territory, with London's Dover Street Market and Selfridges more likely destinations for emerging brands. De Mello argues, however, that there could still be mileage in the strategy.

"They had a strong design forward focus … and they need to do more [of that]," he says. "If you can't get [a brand] anywhere else and you have to go to Harvey Nichols, then it becomes something interesting again. At the moment you walk past it and say: 'Why bother going in?'"

De Mello says Harvey Nichols' digital presence needs work. "The majority of retailers that succeed in today's marketplace do so with a variety of different channels to interface with the consumer," he argues.

If digital is still a work in progress, Harvey Nichols has attempted to revive its bricks and mortar offering recently, particularly its flagship Knightsbridge store. Julia Goddard, previously at Alexander McQueen, has been chief executive since 2024, with the highly respected fashion editor Kate Phelan becoming creative director.

A 2025 redesign put high-end jewellery on the ground floor and added new designers and curated objects. In a press release, Phelan described it as a "statement of intent. We're creating an experience that feels relevant, exciting and, above all, individual. This is just the beginning." The retailer declined to comment for this article.

Buzz-wise, Glenville believes the team should remain in place whoever buys the retailer, and be given time to turn things around. "The [recent] windows with the illustrations were absolutely great," he says "[but] I think they weren't sure what to follow that with. It's unfortunate that anything takes time. You can't do it all in five minutes."

'The end of an era'

Worry over AI direction as DeepMind CEO steps aside

Dan Milmo
Aisha Down

When Sir Demis Hassabis said AI had brought the world to a "pivotal moment in human history" last month, he knew another big change was imminent.

This shift was closer to home. The Nobel prize-winning head of Google's AI unit, Google DeepMind, this week announced he was relinquishing day-to-day duties as chief executive and becoming chairman. He is also taking on the role of chief scientist at DeepMind's parent, Alphabet.

Hassabis and DeepMind have been key players in AI's breakthrough era. The 50-year-old co-founded DeepMind and sold it to Google in 2014 in a move that gave him the resources to oversee a number of advances.

These included building the AlphaGo system that mastered the Chinese board game Go and developing AlphaFold, a programme that predicts the 3D structure of proteins. The latter resulted in Hassabis being awarded the 2024 Nobel prize in chemistry.

DeepMind will now be run by Hassabis's longstanding colleague, US-based Koray Kavukcuoglu, who will take the non-CEO role of senior vice-president of DeepMind.

"The era of DeepMind as an independent actor is over and the obvious sign of that is you have gone from a charismatic founder-leader to appointing Koray in a non-CEO leadership role. Koray is a technical character, not an inspirational figure like Demis," said a former Google executive.

The ex-Google employee added that it would be "galling" for Google and Hassabis that the latest iterations of Google's flagship AI model series, Gemini, have lost ground to models developed by US rivals Anthropic and OpenAI.

Hassabis has said he is looking forward to focusing more on the "big picture" for AI and believes he is handing over operational management of a unit that is ready for the competitive battles ahead.

Internally, DeepMind is a workplace where there have been political tensions. Employees said there is internal disquiet over the company's work with the Pentagon.

Earlier this year, a former Google DeepMind employee launched a legal challenge against Google,

Demis Hassabis has been a key player in the breakthrough of AI

claiming they were unfairly dismissed for their views on Gaza.

That employee was involved in unionisation efforts at Google DeepMind, which have taken place against a backdrop of concerns that Google's AI could assist militaries, including Israel's.

Another Google DeepMind employee resigned from the company in mid-July, citing Google's work with the Pentagon and the US Department of Homeland Security.

One said that Hassabis's departure was the "end of an era".

"Now the person we were supposed to trust to get the right outcomes for humanity has stepped away," they said. Google DeepMind "has become just another subdivision of Google".

Rosa Curling, the executive director of Foxglove, a campaign group which supported the Google DeepMind employee in their legal challenge, said: "The departure of the co-founder of a company that once prided itself on its ethical credentials is likely to cause further concern among its frontier AI staff about how their work will end up being used in the real world."

Google has said it is committed to the "private and public sector consensus" that AI should not be used for domestic mass surveillance or autonomous weaponry without "appropriate human oversight".

> ***'Now the person we were supposed to trust to get the right outcomes for humanity has stepped away'***
>
> **Google employee**

While Google has declined a voluntary union recognition agreement in London, it has said it values "the constructive and direct dialogue that we have with our employees about building a positive and successful workplace".

On the commercial side, a new cutting-edge model, Gemini 3.5 Pro, has yet to be released amid reports it has been delayed due to attempts to improve its code-writing abilities – a core part of the appeal of Anthropic and OpenAI's best products.

Google's two AI labs, London-based DeepMind and California-based Google Brain, were merged into Google DeepMind under Hassabis's leadership three years ago. Control now appears to be moving back to the US, where the Google co-founder Sergey Brin is reportedly playing a bigger role in AI development.

Citing the departure of the leading AI researchers Yann LeCun from Meta and Geoffrey Hinton from Google as another example of "the end of an era in the AI ecosystem", the former employee added: "This is very clearly a sign that the science-driven agenda of leadership in these labs has given way to cold, hard commercial reality that all of these companies want to make a return on the hundreds of billions of dollars they have invested in AI."

The source added, however, that Google still had the benefit of being able to combine its Gemini models with an impressive suite of products from its search engine to its cloud platform and YouTube.

Thanks to its search business, it also has the money to continue investing heavily in AI, having generated a net income of $132bn (£98bn) last year.

Hassabis has also taken on a more statesmanlike role in recent years. The reference to a "pivotal moment" came in a blog post in which Hassabis called for a US safety body to assess cutting-edge models, with the hope it would lead to the establishment of global standards.

The need for such a body, Hassabis argues, is pressing because the tech industry is approaching the "pivotal" point of achieving agentic AI or AGI – the term for a theoretical state of AI where a system can perform any human cognitive task – which also means being capable of performing white collar jobs in sectors such as law, finance and health.

A Google spokesperson said: "This is a move Demis has been thinking about for a while. He is very excited, and this will give him more time to focus on AI-driven scientific breakthroughs." The spokesperson disputed that the changes had anything to do with the performance of Gemini.

Money

Property

Prices slashed but no buyers: why aren't flats selling?

Owners reveal their struggles as figures show many flats do not find a buyer within six months. **Rupert Jones** looks at what is going wrong

"The market is dead for flats," says Susan Young*, who has been trying for some time, without success, to sell her two-bed flat in a popular Devon seaside resort.

The first-floor property is in "immaculate condition", Young says, thanks to the £15,000-£20,000 spent on renovations.

It has "superb views" across the beach. And, perhaps most crucially, it is a freehold flat, so is untainted by the controversies associated with the discredited leasehold system.

"Despite not needing to buy (that is, no chain), and dropping the price to well under what I paid for it, I have only had four viewings in nine months," says Young, a former teacher, who moved in 2023 but now needs to relocate for family reasons.

She paid £300,000 for the property and currently has it on the market for £280,000.

She doesn't want to reduce the price any further and, if there are no viewings by the end of the summer, she intends to take it off the market and put it back on next year when, hopefully, there will be more interest.

She says the flats market is moribund even though hers is in a block of six where each flat owns one-sixth of the freehold and they set their own management fee. "It is very dispiriting."

Meanwhile, Louisa, who lives in London, has been trying to sell her leasehold flat for two-and-a-half years. The sale recently fell through for a third time after several months of negotiations when the buyers demanded she knock £10,000 off the price.

She initially feared having to "sell at a massive loss, losing all my deposit and preventing me from buying in the near future. My property is above a barber shop, and I have been told that banks will not lend mortgages above these, leaving me in a position looking for reasonable cash offers".

However, there is now some hope as she has found a cash buyer.

"So I'm going through the process again," she says. "But I've stated that I will only give the sale a few months before giving up and trying to rent it out. This will be attempt number four."

Louisa bought the flat for £200,000, and the sale that fell through recently was for £145,000.

"It's a one-bed flat, and I now have a two-year-old daughter. This situation has meant we are unable to leave my family home, where we have been staying.

"I just want to move on and give my child a bedroom." But, she adds: "I'm not buying again in the near future. I'm quite traumatised from the experience."

Young and Louisa are just two Guardian readers who responded to a recent call-out asking about their experiences of trying to buy or sell a flat in recent months.

Many of the respondents say the same thing: they have been trying - and trying - to sell a flat.

Some have cut the price several times, but to no avail; others have been left in the lurch when buyers pulled out.

Some are owner-occupiers; others are small landlords who are trying to leave the rental sector.

10%

The percentage the average price of a flat has increased by since 2016 compared with 43% for houses

87%

Percentage of leasehold flats in London that had not sold within six months last year

Scams
Film fans targeted by fake Odyssey websites
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Homes for sale in former pubs
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Some flat owners are struggling to find buyers for their homes even though they are in popular locations
PHOTOGRAPH: BLOOMBERG/GETTY IMAGES

So what's happening?

In June, property website Zoopla issued data showing that the average price of a house was up 43% since 2016 across the UK, but flats had increased by 10% over the same period.

Zoopla said "uncertainty around leasehold in England is affecting the pricing of flats versus houses" and that flats were taking longer to sell as a result.

Most flats listed for sale in England are leasehold. And the long list of scandals and controversies associated with this form of ownership – from high service charges and ground rents and hefty one-off bills, to ongoing cladding issues, costly lease extensions and difficulty buying freeholds – has prompted government action.

But a ban on new leasehold properties in England and Wales is unlikely to come into force until after the next election, and concerns about cost and complexity are clearly having an impact now.

We asked Zoopla to crunch the numbers on flats not selling and why. It found that across most of England, the majority of leasehold flats listed for sale in 2025 had not sold within six months.

"London was worst – about 87% unsold – followed by the south-east (85%) and the east of England (84%)," Richard Donnell, Zoopla executive director, says. The average was 80.5%.

As to why many flats are struggling to find buyers, Donnell says it is not just the leasehold issue, which reinforces the preference for buying a house where possible. It is also to do with who is buying, and who is selling.

"Flats take longer to find buyers because the natural buyer (the first-time buyer) and the natural seller (often an investor with no urgency to move) may want two different prices," he adds.

For example, in London, most first-time buyers are looking for flats, not houses, as their main route into ownership, says Donnell.

"But investor-owned flats are being priced above the typical first-time buyer budget (£450,000 vs a £425,000 budget). So even though flats are what buyers there want, the ones investors are selling are out of reach."

In addition, thousands of aspiring homeowners are finding themselves shut out of the flats market owing to banks' increasingly restrictive mortgage lending rules, says William Coe at the mortgage broker Cleerly.

At the same time, he adds, surveyors are increasingly "down valuing" flats – creating yet another barrier for buyers.

* *Name has been changed*

Top tips
How to sell

- **Know your market** "Chat to your agent about what local first-time buyers can actually afford and who is buying flats and what they are prepared to pay," Richard Donnell at Zoopla says.
- **Price realistically from day one** Buyers have a lot of choice, so getting the asking price right is crucial. "The key to selling a flat successfully in the current market is pricing competitively from day one," Colleen Babcock, Rightmove's property expert, says.
- **Major on all the benefits** Buying agent Henry Pryor says that aside from the obvious – "make it clean, make it tidy, make it desirable, make it smell of freshly baked bread and coffee …" – sellers should also emphasise the property's "lock up and leave" benefits. "Lock up and leave" means requiring very little in terms of daily maintenance.
- **Be on top of your service charge history** Some potential buyers will ask for (at least) three years of service charge accounts (where relevant). So sort these out before you list the property and be ready to explain the trend, Donnell says. A recent Zoopla analysis showed that the typical leaseholder pays £1,900 a year in service charges, plus £200 a year in ground rent.
- **Lease length matters** About a fifth of leasehold listings have less than 100 years left on the lease, according to Zoopla. Leaseholders have the statutory right to extend their lease at a cost which rises quickly once a lease drops below 80 years, it adds. "For flats with less than 85 years remaining, consider applying to extend the lease before listing," Donnell says. The Leasehold and Freehold Reform Act 2024 will make it cheaper and easier to extend a lease, but it's not yet clear when these measures will come into force.
- **Six may be the magic number** "You should always be able to attract an investor by pricing your property so that a buyer would generate a 6%, or better, yield," Pryor says. You need to work out what your flat would rent for (local estate agents should be able to provide that information). Then work out what capital value would generate that 6%, or better, yield. To do this, take the annual potential rent – the per calendar month figure x 12 – multiply this by 100, then divide by six.

▲ *It is vital to know your market when you are trying to sell your flat*

Energy

Need to keep cool? Just turn on the heat pump

It might seem an unlikely way to stop overheating, but many owners have found the tech a lifeline in the heatwave. **Zoe Wood** reports

"If it is 35C outdoors, I can get the temperature down to 21C," says Andrew Ingram of the sanctuary that his living room has provided this summer.

"On the nights I've slept in there, you have to put your thick pyjamas on," jokes Ingram, who lives in Maidenhead, Berkshire, with his wife, Sue.

"When I post on Facebook about it, people say: 'That's air conditioning' and I say: 'No, it's the heat pump.' It's just working the other way around."

Rather than generating heat from burning fuel, a heat pump transfers heat energy from one place to another. However, despite the name, heat pumps can be used for cooling, too.

The energy is released through an "emitter" such as a radiator or underfloor heating. The Ingrams have an air source heat pump. It extracts heat from the air outside and uses it to warm the radiators of their three-bedroom house (this is called an air-to-water system).

In 2023, when the Ingrams ripped out their gas boiler, the firm suggested they consider whether they wanted to cool any rooms.

"We thought about it because the sitting room gets really hot, and that's the room we spend time in," Ingram says.

"It's been a revelation. We bought it on the basis that there might be a heatwave, and it's been an absolute lifeline this year."

The couple have radiators throughout but the living room also has another "emitter" – called a fan coil unit. This blows air over hot or cold pipes. The whole new home energy system cost roughly £18,600, with the cooling aspect accounting for £1,700 of that.

"If you're pumping cool water around a property, it's a bit like putting cool beer in a glass on a warm day," says Ingram of what is potentially one of the pitfalls of cooling this way.

"You get loads of condensation, so you either have to wrap pipes in quite sophisticated trunking or do what we did, which is have them outside.

"We used the cooling a bit in 2024, and, guess what, in 2025 even more – and in 2026 we've been a popular place for people to visit."

The government's boiler upgrade scheme offers grants of £7,500 to assist homeowners in England and Wales with the cost of installing an air-to-water or ground-to-water system (a heat pump that extracts heat from the ground through buried pipes).

To qualify for funding, the heat pump must be certified through the Microgeneration Certification Scheme, which certifies installers.

Previously heat pumps that also cooled required planning permission, as the permitted development rights rules (legal permissions that allow certain home improvements without a planning application) stated they had to be solely for heating. The PDR has now been updated to allow cooling.

To date, Britons have mostly installed air-to-water systems, and of the UK's 358,000 heat pumps, approximately 323,000 are this type, according to MCS data.

This could be about to change because the government is to offer £2,500 grants for air conditioning units that can heat and cool. The air-to-air heat pumps move heat using wall-mounted fans and cost about £4,500 to fit in a flat or small house. (Air-to-water heat pumps typically cost about £12,000.)

The run of heatwaves has thrown the spotlight on "heat-trap homes". A recent report by the Climate Change Committee said that hotter heatwaves could lead to 92% of existing homes overheating by 2050 and they may require air conditioning, as passive measures such as drawing curtains and opening windows are unlikely to be enough.

A recent study conducted in the Energy House 2.0 – a £16m climate-controlled chamber at the University of Salford – found that using a heat pump for cooling can "significantly reduce overheating" in modern homes.

Two new modern houses have been built inside the weather simulation facility so that scientists can test how "real" homes perform under extreme conditions.

The Salford scientists paired a heat pump with fan coils in one of the houses. When the lab weather was 32C, the rooms stayed comfortable – between 19C and 24.9C. With the heat pump running around the clock, the cost was £2.50-£3 a day.

Prof Lubo Jankovic, the scientist leading the research, says the results "demonstrate that reversible heat pumps can play an important role in protecting future homes against overheating".

But Jankovic says the challenge of designing systems with both heating and cooling in mind "needs to be addressed before cooling this way becomes mainstream".

With the October price cap predicted to exceed £1,700 a year for a typical dual fuel bill, the big question for many is: will a heat pump save me money?

When it comes to bills, the Energy Saving Trust says the biggest saving comes in homes that switch to a dedicated heat pump energy tariff and add other green technologies such as solar panels.

Heat pump users moving on to a time-of-use tariff can save about £330 a year compared with sitting on a flat-rate tariff, the trust says. This rises to about £800 with extras such as solar, although these add to the upfront costs.

The Ingrams have solar panels and a home battery to help keep their bills down. "There's lots of juice in the batteries from the solar," Ingram says. "The batteries charge up overnight if they're not full, but they have been recently. So if you want to run the pump, it is running on free or very cheap electricity."

▲ *Turning hot and cold: investing in a heat pump can keep the house warm in winter and cool during a heatwave* PHOTOGRAPH: GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

Scams

Film fans targeted by fake Odyssey websites

▲ *Scammers are trying to exploit interest in Christopher Nolan's epic adaptation of The Odyssey*
PHOTOGRAPH: LANDMARK MEDIA/ALAMY

Shane Hickey

Criminals are trying to capitalise on the popularity of Christopher Nolan's hit movie The Odyssey by claiming that people can watch the film online for free, in an attempt to steal their personal and financial details.

A number of websites have been set up in different languages in an attempt to make the scam more convincing.

However, anyone who is tempted to try to avoid paying the cinema ticket price has been warned they run the risk of having their computer infected with malware and becoming the target of future phishing scams.

The Odyssey, adapted from Homer's epic ancient Greek poem, features a roll call of stars including Matt Damon, Tom Holland and Anne Hathaway. It has been widely acclaimed by critics and become one of the biggest hits of the summer.

Criminals are keen to try to exploit interest in the new film and hope that their eagerness to find ways to watch it for free means they will be fooled by the fake sites. This is a common tactic used by scammers when big films or TV shows are released, as well as video games.

The cybersecurity company Kaspersky says some of the fake websites claim to offer dubbed versions of the film in the victim's native language. The language is selected by the site depending on the geolocation of the victim.

In some cases consumers are targeted via pop-up advertising; in others, the sites appear in search results or are accessed via other websites. Reviews and ratings – all fake – are left by "users" who have supposedly watched the film on the site.

Typically, when the victim tries to play the film on the sites, they are asked to register to unlock the content, which they are told is free.

They are asked to submit their email address and full name. Later, they are asked to put in their bank details, which the site claims are needed in order to activate a free trial. The sites typically claim that those who sign up will be offered unlimited access to content over multiple devices.

▲ *The sites promise versions of the film in the user's native language*

Olga Altukhova, an analyst at Kaspersky, says criminals often try to exploit the loyalty of fans who are awaiting the release of a big film or show.

She says consumers should be particularly wary if a film that has only just been released and is still showing in cinemas suddenly pops up on an unfamiliar platform.

"We strongly encourage people to access content only through official services in order to protect their personal data and avoid potential financial losses."

BeStreamWise, a UK campaign body set up to alert the public to the dangers of illegal streaming, says people who submit their personal details are at risk of further frauds in the future.

"Our latest data shows just how real those risks are. More than half of people who stream illegally have experienced a malware infection in the past year, while one in five have been targeted by phishing scams," a spokesperson says.

"We've also seen that two in five scam victims believed they were targeted as a result of illegal streaming, with victims losing an average of £1,680 to fraud. Sticking to legitimate sources is the safest way to protect yourself and enjoy the latest blockbuster films."

Among the risks from illegal streaming is the potential for malware to be downloaded on to a computer. This could result in a hacker getting control of the device and accessing it remotely.

Kaspersky advises that people should only watch films on official webpages and that they check the URLs to ensure that it is a legitimate page.

If someone does find they have been defrauded, they are advised to immediately inform their bank and then change passwords on sites and apps such as their bank and investment and pension providers. Then turn on multifactor authentication to bolster security.

In the UK, you should contact Action Fraud, the national fraud reporting centre.

Consumer champion
Anna Tims

Hastings Direct's failures forced us out of our home

Eight months after reporting a leak to our home insurer, Hastings Direct, my husband and I and our two-year-old are still effectively homeless.

Last winter, we discovered that a leak beneath our fridge-freezer had caused extensive damage to the floorboards of our kitchen/living room.

Since then we have experienced significant delays, poor communication and conflicting information, and what I believe is a failure by the insurer and its contractors to properly manage the claim.

A promised call-back never materialised because call staff failed to log the claim. Work finally commenced more than five months later.

The contractors removed all the kitchen units, despite the fact that most were undamaged and were not included in the schedule of works, and Hastings now wants us to contribute £8,000 to replace them.

There is still no functioning kitchen in the property, which means we cannot return home.

We initially agreed to move into temporary accommodation for what we were told would be approximately two weeks. It's now been nearly three months.

The insurer only authorises accommodation in two-week increments, creating uncertainty about where we will stay next. We have had to pay for extra nursery sessions for our daughter since we both have to work from home, and the latest temporary flat is too small to accommodate all of us.

We have also had to keep our two cats in a cattery at our expense and, because the kitchen is ill-equipped, we have to rely on takeaways and ready meals.

We still have no clear timeline for when the work will be finished.
JS, *Croydon*

Hastings Direct readily admitted to me that on this occasion its service has fallen short. You will be delighted to hear that it is "taking forward learning" to improve things in the light of your ordeal.

▲ *Hastings Direct's delays in dealing with a claim lasted for months*

It attributes some of the delays to the unexpected extent of the damage, and some to "issues" with the contractors who are managing the claim. The kitchen units and appliances should never have been removed, it acknowledges.

So why were you charged for their reinstatement? It was a "statement" that was issued "prematurely", it says, adding that it would shoulder the cost of the blunder as a "goodwill gesture".

Under pressure from me, the company has agreed a programme of repairs and an estimated timescale. It simultaneously extended your accommodation for a month to give you some security.

You hope to be back home in a week's time, and Hastings has agreed to offer an as-yet-unspecified amount of compensation to reflect the distress caused and to refund your nursery, cattery and other expenses.

Car hire firm told me I was a 'no-show' so I lost £185

I booked a car hire at Heathrow through Holiday Autos on a visit to the UK and provided my flight number as requested.

My flight was severely delayed, and when I reached the car hire desk, I was told I'd been marked down as a "no-show" and that my car had been rehired.

Under duress, I was forced to hire a larger car for twice the price, and was told I would not be refunded the original £185 hire fee.

Since then, the car hire company has told me to complain to Holiday Autos, and vice versa.
BF, *Australia*

The terms and conditions of your contract state that a definition of a "no-show" is a customer who arrives late because of a flight delay without having provided a flight number. You had provided your number, so the supplier would have been able to verify your flight status, but neither party would accept this when you complained.

Holiday Autos tells me your car was no longer available owing to "operational constraints". But you had prepaid, so there was no financial loss to the hire firm if it had held the vehicle until your arrival.

It insists that cars cannot be held indefinitely even if flight details are provided, but it did not mention this in the terms.

Holiday Autos says an upgraded vehicle was offered instead, without disclosing that you were forced to pay handsomely for the privilege.

The company has, however, performed a magnanimous U-turn.

"While the additional charges were agreed directly between the customer and the car rental supplier, we recognise the impact this experience had on the trip," it says. "As a gesture of goodwill, we have refunded the costs of the original rental plus the additional upgrade and insurance costs incurred."

We welcome letters but cannot answer individually. Email us at consumer.champions@theguardian.com or write to Consumer Champions, Money, the Guardian, 90 York Way, London N1 9GU. Please include a daytime phone number. Submission and publication of all letters is subject to our terms and conditions: http://theguardian.com/letters-terms

Fantasy house hunt
Homes in former pubs

Compiled by Anna White

◀ Great Tosson, Northumberland
£925,000

Tosson Tower House has been a family home, and at times a bed and breakfast, for nearly a century. Before this it was a drovers' inn, and the cellars and cold stores are still accessible. The five-bedroom property has a farmhouse-style kitchen with an Aga, a laundry room and a study. There's a sitting room and a drawing room that opens on to the garden, which has views over the valley of the River Coquet. Attached is a cottage, which is currently run as a holiday let. There are walks nearby in the Simonside Hills in the Northumberland national park. *Knight Frank, 0131 222 9606*

▶ Deptford, London
£435,000

This curved four-storey building, rendered in white, dominates the top end of the high street, a short walk from the Thames. It was, until the 1990s, the landmark Noah's Ark pub, and now has retail units on the ground floor and one- and two-bedroom flats above. Entrance is via a residents' foyer. There is a first-floor apartment for sale with two bedrooms and one bathroom. The open-plan kitchen-living room has a trio of sash windows overlooking the busy high street lined with restaurants and eateries, and the shops of Deptford Market Yard. *Foxtons, 020 7133 7744*

▲ Islington, London
£500,000

The old Langton Arms sign still hangs on the exposed brick wall of the open-plan living room in this one-bedroom apartment. The Victorian pub, with a blue frontage, finally stopped serving pints in 1989. The bedroom and bathroom are on the second level. The pub sits in the triangle of Goswell Road, City Road and Old Street. Green space can be found at St Luke's Gardens. *FolkTale, 020 4621 6201*

▼ Spetisbury, Dorset
£300,000

The Woodpecker pub was redeveloped as three properties but the sign still hangs outside. The first resale is a two-bedroom semi-detached house with the ground floor dedicated to an open-plan sitting room and kitchen. Two bedrooms are upstairs. The village is on the banks of the River Stour, three miles from the Georgian market town of Blandford Forum. *Symonds & Sampson, 01258 452670*

◀ Staines, Surrey
£1.25m

Swan House is on a private road on the edge of town – beyond is open countryside. The handsome brick property covers three floors and has six bedrooms, five bathrooms and four reception rooms and includes a self-contained one-bedroom annexe. On the ground floor is a family-sized open-plan kitchen under a vaulted ceiling with floor-to-ceiling bifold doors that open on to the patio and lawn. On the top floor is the main bedroom, which has an en suite and a balcony overlooking the garden. Staines mainline railway station is just over a mile away. *Jackson-Stops, 01932 821 160*

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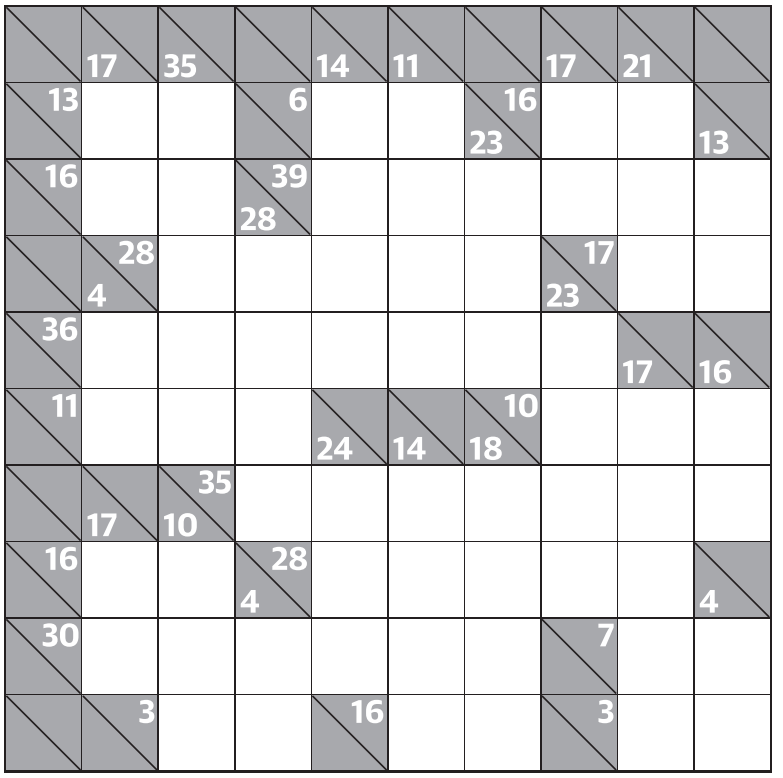
Puzzles

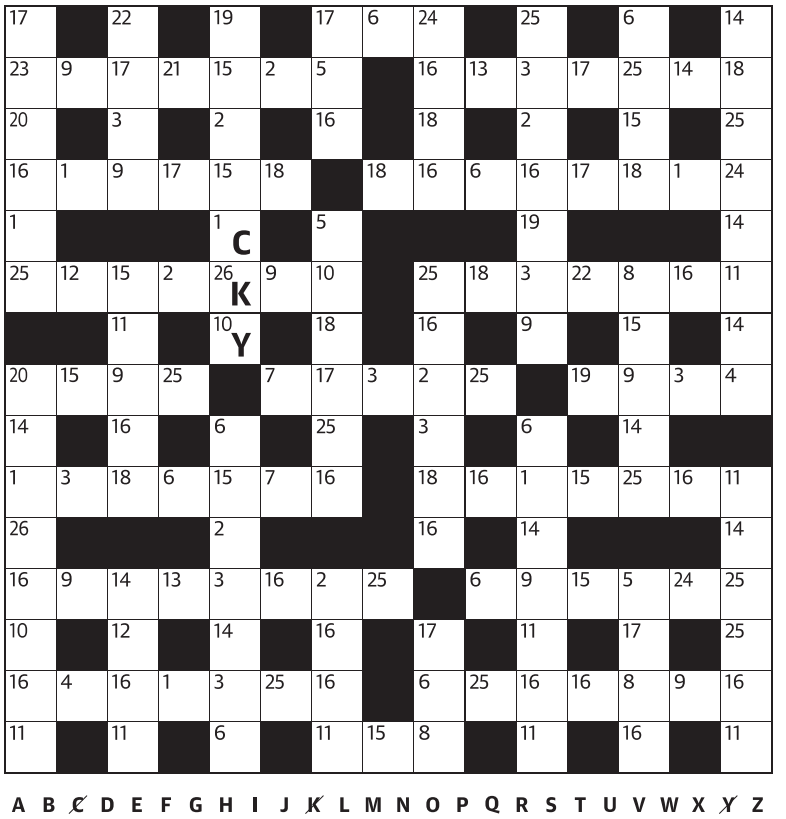
Kakuro

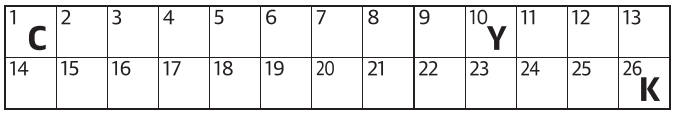
Fill the grid so that each block adds up to the total in the box above or to the left of it. You can only use the digits 1-9 and you must not use the same number twice in a block.



Codeword

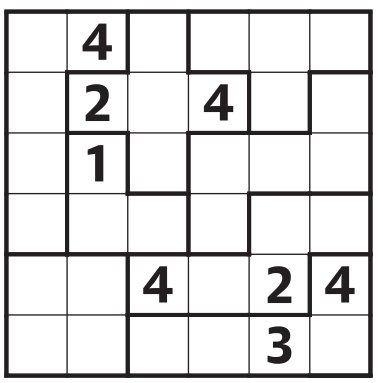
Crack the code to fill in the crossword grid. Each letter of the alphabet makes at least one appearance in the grid and is represented by the same number wherever it appears. A number of letters have been decoded to help with the identification of other letters and words in the grid.





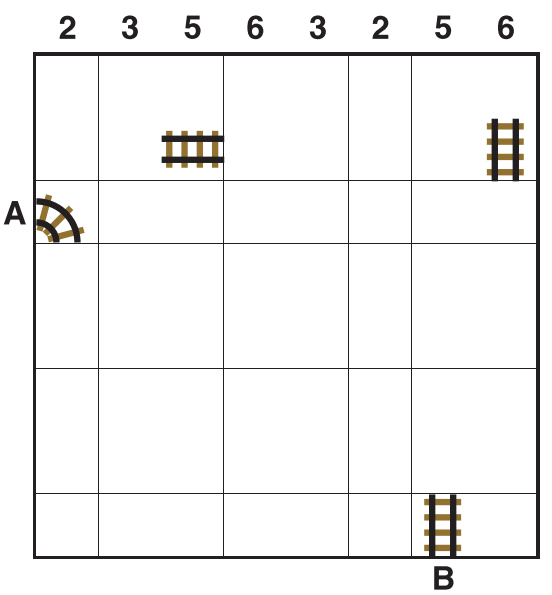
Suguru

Fill the grid so that each square in an outlined block contains a digit. A block of two squares contains the digits 1 and 2, a block of three squares contains the digits 1, 2 and 3, and so on. No same digit appears in neighbouring squares, not even diagonally.



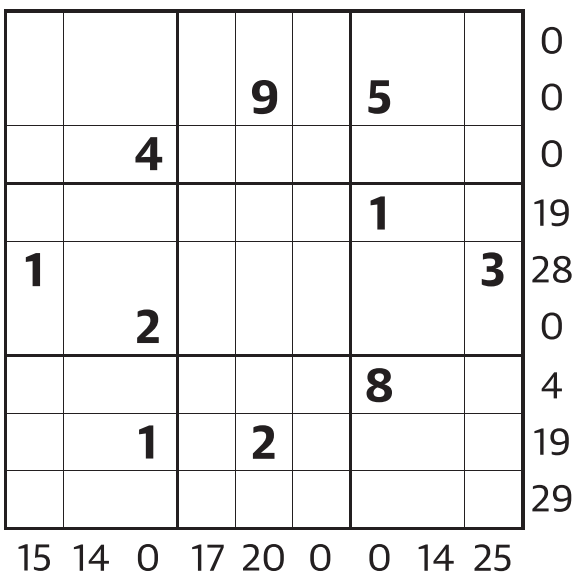
Train tracks

Lay tracks to enable the train to travel from village A to village B. The numbers indicate how many sections of rail go in each row and column. There are only straight rails and curved rails. The track cannot cross itself.



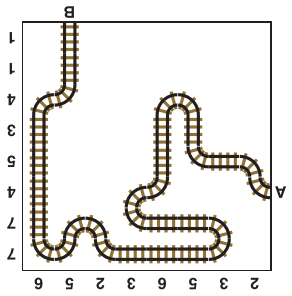
Sandwich sudoku

Medium
Place the digits from 1-9 in each row, column and 3x3 block. The clues outside the grid show the sum of the numbers placed between the 1 and 9 in that row or column.



Solutions

Train tracks



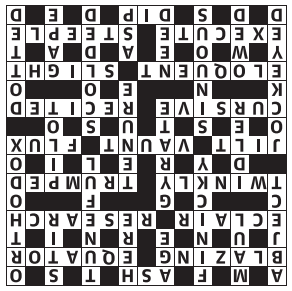
Word wheel

TIGHTROPE

Suguru

2	3	1	5	3	2
4	1	4	2	1	4
2	3	2	3	5	3
5	1	5	1	2	4
3	2	3	4	3	5
1	4	1	2	1	4

Codeword

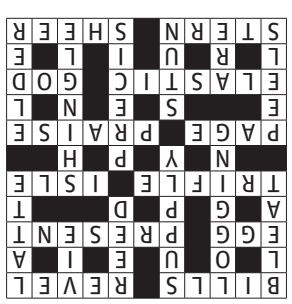


Kakuro

	17	35		14	11		17	21	
13			6			16 23			13
16			39 28						
	28 4						17 23		
36								17	16
11				24	14	10 18			
	17	35 10							
16			28 4						4
30							7		
	3			16			3		

Quick cryptic

Solution no 123



Puzzles

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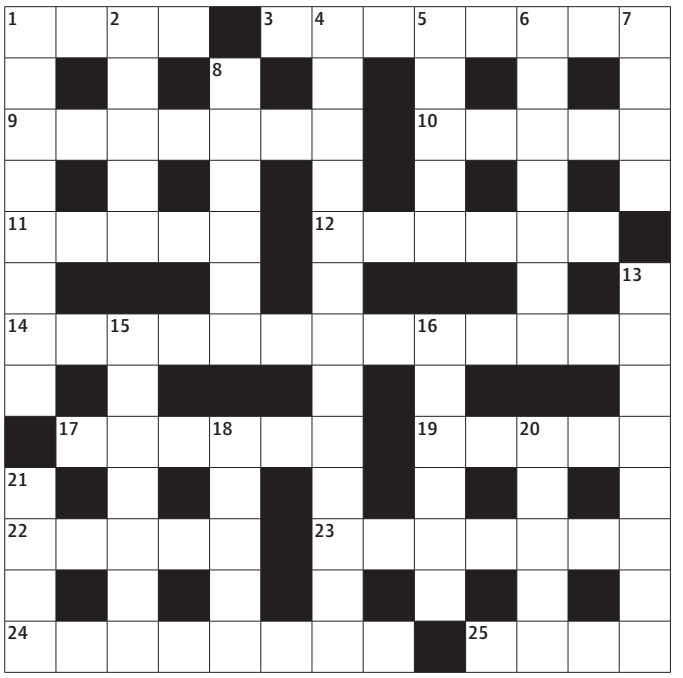
Quick crossword no 17,553

Across

1 Toy, target or top (4)
3 On the other side of the page (8)
9 Cockle or mussel, say (7)
10 One goes to the polls (5)
11 Support - acceptance (3-2)
12 Rectangle (6)
14 Sober - as OAP insisted (anag) (13)
17 Soluble substance which can neutralise acids (6)
19 It's raised in support (5)
22 Layered vegetable (5)
23 Small waterfall (7)
24 Forte or Fawlty? (8)
25 Top of the range? (4)

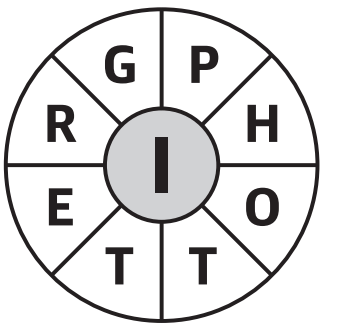
Down

1 A person of consequence (8)
2 Ornamental garden building (5)
4 Where one problem leads to another, compounding the original difficulty (7,6)
5 Competitor (5)
6 Baltic state bordering Russia and Latvia (7)
7 Plant which reproduces via spores (4)
8 South American plant grown for its rice-like seeds (6)
13 Time for a drink (3,5)
15 One plays alone (7)
16 Slow on the uptake (6)
18 Cancel (5)
20 Treatment (5)
21 Heavy hitter? (4)



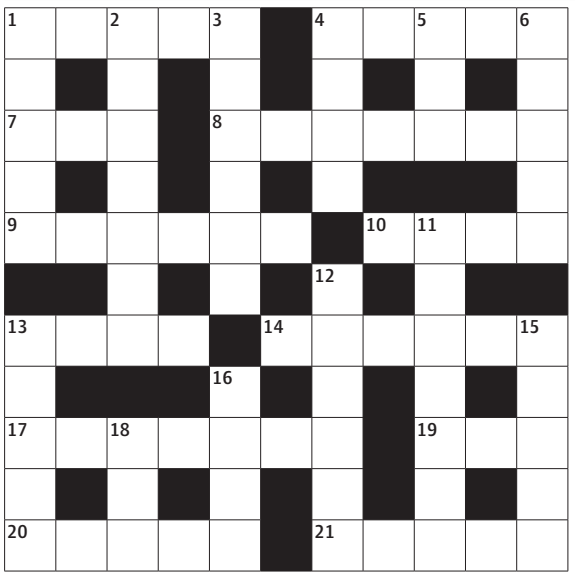
Word wheel

Find as many words as possible using the letters in the wheel. Each must use the central letter and at least two others. Letters may be used only once. You may not use plurals, foreign words or proper nouns. There is at least one nine-letter word. Target: Excellent-36. Very good-31. Good -25. Target -20.



Guardian quick cryptic crossword

No 123 set by Pangakupu



Across

1 Avian features in posters? (5)
4 Backing bar party (5)
7 Urge taking long strides when throwing off clothing (3)
8 Unexpectedly repents now (7)
9 Ineptly filter a small amount (6)
10 Hoodwinked, without protection in place surrounded by water (4)
13 Send out a message for part of book (4)
14 Unlimited elevated commendation (6)
17 Twisted laciest component of knickers? (7)
19 Deity to follow around (3)
20 Hard back (5)
21 Very steep swerve (5)

Down

1 Complain, table being wobbly (5)
2 Severe punishments uncovered for taking wood from forest (7)
3 Quantity provided in a flexible way (6)
4 Water plant hunted animal overturned (4)
5 Contend with creeping plant hiding edges (3)
6 Flannel peeled to make coffee? (5)
11 English rocks or stones on beach (7)
12 Ridiculous prices, in summary (6)
13 Outer parts of fruit drop off, turning upside down (5)
15 One very respected tree (5)
16 Surprise fans after upset (4)
18 Live a long time, having turned up (3)

TODAY'S TRICKS
Clues begin or end with a definition of the answer. The rest is one of these:
Anagram Anagram of answer and hint that there's an anagram 'Senator arranged crime (7)' gives TREASON
Double definition Both halves are definitions! 'Search scrub (5)' gives SCOUR
Reversal Answer backwards, and a hint that we're reversing 'Medic's fish rejected (3)' gives DOC
Naked words Remove first and last letters of another word for answer 'Called for citrus to be peeled (4)' gives RANG

Yesterday's Quick crossword

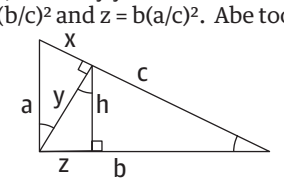
Solution no 17,552

O	P	T	I	M	I	S	M	■	M	Y	N	A
N	■	A	■	U	■	H	■	F	■	O	■	R
C	E	C	I	L	■	A	C	R	O	B	A	T
E	■	T	■	T	■	G	■	A	■	B	■	I
■	D	I	S	I	N	G	E	N	U	O	U	S
A	■	L	■	F	■	Y	■	K	■	■	■	T
C	A	E	S	A	R	■	M	E	M	B	E	R
A	■	■	■	C	■	C	■	N	■	E	■	Y
P	R	E	R	E	Q	U	I	S	I	T	E	■
U	■	D	■	T	■	R	■	T	■	W	■	S
L	A	D	D	E	R	S	■	E	X	E	R	T
C	■	I	■	D	■	O	■	I	■	E	■	E
O	B	E	Y	■	B	R	A	N	D	N	E	W

Want more? Get access to more than 4,000 puzzles at theguardian.com/crossword. To buy puzzle books, visit www.guardianbookshop.com or call **0330 333 6846**.

Chris Maslanka
Solutions

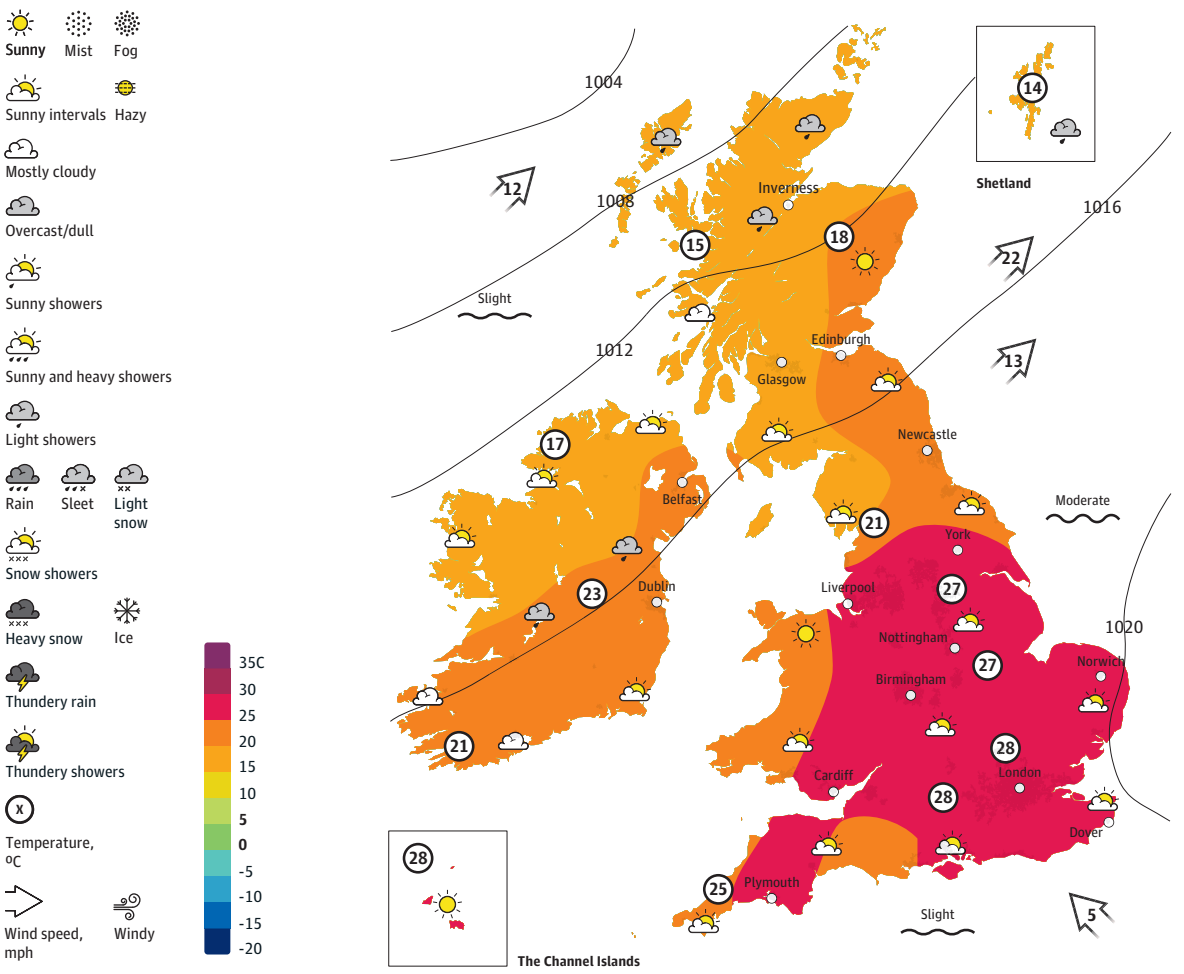
1 Working in cents we have: 100B + A - 68 = 2(100A + B), and we seek solutions (A, B) in positive integers. Rearranging this we see B = (199A + 68)/98, with constraint(s) A, B ≤ 99. Then B = 2A + (3A + 68)/98 and we deduce 3A + 68 = 98n for some whole number n. The smallest value of n = 1, works, yielding (A, B) = (10, 21) - so a solution. Are there others? Well, n = 2, yields fractional A; n = 3 won't work as 68 is not a multiple of 3; and n = 4 or more yields A > 99; so our answer (A, B) = (10, 21) is unique. **2** By similar triangles: x/a = a/c, so x = a^2/c; similarly y = ab/c. Likewise h = $a(b/c)^2$ and z = $b(a/c)^2$. Abe took



an area (xy)/2 = $(ab/2)(a/c)^2$, which is $(a/c)^2$ as a fraction of the whole. Babe took $(ab/2)(ab/c^2)^2$, which is a fraction $(ab)^2/(c^4)$. **Points to Ponder**: Prove in two ways that the fraction left is $[1 - (a/c)^2](b/c)^2$. Check that the fractions taken by Abe and Babe and what is left sum to unity.] Substituting (a, b, c) = (3, 4, 5) we find Abe took 9/25 of the pie, Babe took 144/625 and a fraction 256/625 was left. **3** He should choose the last position. The chance of the second red ace turning up last for n cards is (n - 1)/[n(n - 1)/2] = 2/n. This is 1/26 if n = 52. **4** We want BBB/3 = ABC. Clearly B > 3 [Why?]. But B = 4 works: 444/3 = 148. We can discount B = 6 and B = 9 (why?); so we need check only B = 5, B = 7 and B = 8. None of these works; so ABC = 148 is the unique solution. **Reader's Corner:** Pyrgic #5 of 18 July asked for a proof that a string of n 6s followed by a 5 when squared gives a string of n 4s, followed by a string of n 2s followed by 25. If [6(n)] is our ad hoc notation of a string of n sixes, we seek to find $[10[6(n)] + 5]^2 = [(10)(2/3)[9(n)] + 5]^2$. This yields 3 terms. First: $(10^2)(4/9)((10^n) - 1)^2$. Trick coming up: $[(10^n - 1)]^2 = (10^n - 1)[9(n)]$; so first term is: $10^2[4(n)]10^n - 10^2[4(n)] = 10^{(n + 2)}[4(n)] - 10^2[4(n)]$. The middle term is $(10^2)[6(n)]$; last term is $5^2 = 25$. Assembling the parts: $10^{(n + 2)}[4(n)] + 10^2[6(n)] - 10^2[4(n)] + 25 = [4(n)][2(n)]25$. QED. **Wordpool** b), a), c); **EPU** FRAUDULENCE; **Dropouts** HEADIER, HEAVIER, HOARIER; **Same Difference** OUTAGE, OUTRAGE; **Cryptic** JUANITA; **Missing Links** a) hot/desk/top; b) log/jam/roll; c) riding/crop/yield; d) picture/frame/work; e) sour/dough/nut; f) con/done/thing

Weather
Saturday 8 August 2026

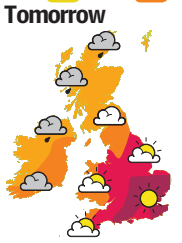
UK and Ireland Noon today



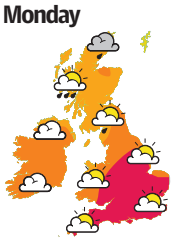
The Channel Islands

Forecast

Low 13 High 22
Tomorrow



Low 14 High 22
Monday



Carbon count

Daily atmospheric CO_2 readings from Mauna Loa, Hawaii (ppm):

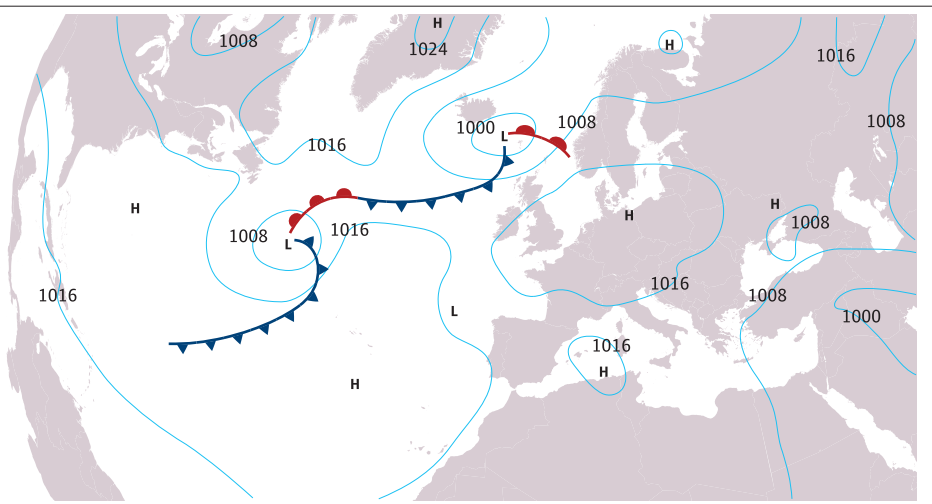
Latest	
02 Aug 2026	428.47
Weekly average	
26 Jul 2026	429.00
07 Aug 2025	426.74
07 Aug 2016	404.17
Pre-industrial base	*280*
Safe level	*350*

Source: NOAA-ESRL

Around the UK

	Lows and highs		Precipitation	Air pollution
London	15	28	0%	Low
Manchester	13	26	5%	Low
Edinburgh	15	21	55%	Low
Belfast	14	19	85%	Low
Birmingham	13	27	0%	Low
Brighton	13	22	0%	Low
Bristol	14	25	0%	Low
Cardiff	14	25	5%	Low
Newcastle	13	22	10%	Low
Penzance	17	23	5%	Low

Atlantic front



Weather tracker

Another pulse of heat is expected to affect central and western Europe next week. The latest forecast models show daily maximum temperatures in the high 30s celsius across France, Spain and Italy during the first half of the week, while Germany, Poland and Czechia will experience the highest temperatures towards the end of the week. The shift in the focus of the heat as the week progresses can be attributed to the movement of high pressure. At the start of the week, low pressure centred in the Atlantic and high pressure centred over the low countries will draw warm air in from southern Europe northwards into parts of France.

The heat in central and western Europe has been unrelenting. Last week's weather tracker highlighted extreme record-breaking temperatures for July in Austria. Days later, on 4 August, the all-time record was shattered with 41C in Wien-Stammersdorf, in the north-east. That record was broken again the next day with 41.2C in Bad Deutsch-Altenburg. The European heatwave is associated with a vertically extensive anticyclone. This has had the effect of raising the freezing level above 4,000m across much of the Alpine region. **Ed Walton**

Around the world

Algiers	36	Lisbon	30
Ams'dam	25	Madrid	38
Athens	36	Malaga	30
Auckland	14	Melb'rne	16
B Aires	13	Mexico C	23
Bangkok	33	Miami	33
Barcelona	32	Milan	35
Basra	49	Mombasa	28
Beijing	32	Moscow	25
Berlin	25	Mumbai	31
Bermuda	30	N Orleans	32
Brussels	28	Nairobi	24
Budapest	31	New Delhi	32
C'hagen	21	New York	31
Cairo	36	Oslo	22
Cape Town	17	Paris	31
Chicago	28	Perth	13
Corfu	36	Prague	27
Dakar	32	Reykjavik	13
Dhaka	31	Rio de J	26
Dublin	22	Rome	33
Florence	37	Shanghai	33
Gibraltar	28	Singapore	33
H Kong	35	Stockh'm	21
Harare	23	Strasb'g	33
Helsinki	21	Sydney	18
Istanbul	31	Tel Aviv	32
Jo'burg	20	Tenerife	30
K Lumpur	33	Tokyo	32
K'mandu	28	Toronto	28
Kabul	31	Vancouv'r	23
Kingston	33	Vienna	30
Kolkata	31	Warsaw	22
L Angeles	31	Wash'ton	33
Lagos	27	Well'ton	13
Lima	25	Zurich	31

High tides

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Aberdeen	0833	3.6m	2122	3.5m	**London Bridge**	0833	5.7m	2110	6.1m
Avonmouth	0135	10.1m	1415	10.0m	**Lossiemouth**	0635	3.4m	1924	3.3m
Barrow	0620	7.5m	1902	7.3m	**Milford Haven**	0046	5.6m	1329	5.5m
Belfast	0557	3.0m	1841	3.0m	**Newquay**	--	--	1228	5.3m
Cobh	--	--	1233	3.4m	**North Shields**	1037	4.2m	2328	4.2m
Cromer	0124	4.0m	1352	4.2m	**Oban**	0055	3.0m	1335	3.0m
Dover	0605	5.3m	1846	5.5m	**Penzance**	--	--	1155	4.4m
Dublin	0642	3.5m	1928	3.5m	**Plymouth**	0004	4.4m	1256	4.4m
Galway	--	--	1242	4.1m	**Portsmouth**	0634	3.9m	1912	4.0m
Greenock	0653	2.8m	1915	2.9m	**Southport**	0503	7.5m	1745	7.4m
Harwich	0638	3.2m	1901	3.3m	**Stornoway**	0210	3.8m	1501	3.8m
Holyhead	0518	4.6m	1810	4.6m	**Portland**	0101	1.3m	1406	1.4m
Hull	0053	5.9m	1334	6.2m	**Whitby**	--	--	1110	4.7m
Leith	0944	4.6m	2232	4.6m	**Wick**	0616	2.8m	1904	2.8m
Liverpool	0557	7.8m	1844	7.7m	**Workington**	0623	6.7m	1908	6.7m

Sun & Moon

Sun rises	0534
Sun sets	2036
Moon rises	none
Moon sets	1755
New Moon	12 Aug

Forecasts and graphics provided by **AccuWeather** ©2026

Lighting up

Belfast	2112 to 0550
Birm'ham	2046 to 0540
Brighton	2034 to 0539
Bristol	2046 to 0547
Carlisle	2100 to 0535
Cork	2111 to 0609
Dublin	2108 to 0554
Glasgow	2110 to 0538
Harlech	2057 to 0548
Inverness	2116 to 0529
London	2036 to 0536
M'chester	2052 to 0539
Newcastle	2056 to 0530
Norwich	2035 to 0527
Penzance	2054 to 0603

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Ours is a world in turmoil – and Xi is taking full advantage *Simon Tisdall, page 3*

They're just bikes for hire, but they speak to a divided city *Andy Beckett, page 4*

How a young Nigerian was lured to London by organ traffickers *The long read, page 8*

The Guardian Saturday 8 August 2026

Journal

Opinion and ideas

One summer doesn't make a Keminaissance. Not even close

Jonathan Freedland

The Keminaissance will be delayed. For nearly a year, Conservative optimists and a clutch of supportive pundits have been forecasting an upturn in the fortunes of Kemi Badenoch, confident that her party will emerge from the crater it fell into in 2024, overtake Reform UK to become once again the main party of the right and, who knows, maybe, with a following wind, even push Labour aside and return to government. Every sign of strength from the Tory leader – a robust conference speech here, a viral clip on social media there – has been hailed as evidence of the coming Keminaissance. On the evidence of the past week or so, we will have to wait a little longer.

It's quite true that Badenoch's personal ratings are better than those of her party. True, too, that she ended a long losing streak when the Tories won a Westminster seat at the Aberdeen South byelection in June. But there is a more recent election result that should temper the boosters' enthusiasm, along with a series of decisions that confirm that, when it comes to both strategy and judgment, Badenoch is badly lacking.

Start with that contest from a week ago. For many, the standout fact of the byelection to replace Andy Burnham as mayor of Greater Manchester was that Reform came a very poor second, taking just 21% of the vote to Labour's 47%. It was indeed a crushing defeat for Nigel Farage's party, which a matter of weeks earlier had talked up its chances of winning the mayoralty.

But run your finger further down the vote tally until it finally reaches the Conservative candidate on a mere 7.7%. In all the previous mayoral contests in Greater Manchester, the Tories were in second place. This time they were fifth, behind Restore Britain, a party of the hard right that has become home to all manner of racists and white supremacists.

Her strategic response to this competition on the right has been to move towards her rivals, hoping to blunt the appeal of the nationalist populist parties by matching their offer. The latest step came late on Thursday with, as the Telegraph billed it, a Tory "promise to end council housing for foreigners". Badenoch's pledge is to evict almost 230,000 non-EU foreign national households from their homes. Never mind that many of those turfed out will include people who, while not UK citizens, have been living, working and paying taxes in Britain for years, while others will be refugees fleeing war and persecution. Never mind that, once

Kemi Badenoch in Teesside earlier this year

PHOTOGRAPH: PA/ALAMY STOCK/ ALAMY LIVE NEWS

2

One summer doesn't make a Keminaissance. Not even close

Jonathan Freedland

← Continued from front

evicted, those families will be rendered homeless, leaving local councils with the choice of either abandoning them to the streets or providing (much costlier) emergency accommodation. Never mind that it's unclear who exactly would identify and locate these families, unless Badenoch plans to create a British equivalent of ICE, mounting raids, snatching terrified people from their cars and throwing them into detention. Never mind all that; Badenoch doesn't care.

So much for the policy; now consider the timing. The Tory leader decided the right moment to demand foreigners be kicked out of their homes was as the Norfolk town of Thetford entered its third night of violence and disorder, triggered by a mob surrounding the accommodation of suspected asylum seekers, some in the crowd trying to force their way in, as others threw rocks and chanted: "We want them out." Into this tinderbox of a situation walked the Conservative party leader, clutching a petrol can.

Just a day or two earlier, she had been defending the selection as a Somerset council candidate of Joshua Bonehill-Paine, a man who has served long jail sentences for, among other things, a sustained campaign of antisemitic harassment and abuse of the Jewish former MP Luciana Berger, a campaign that saw Berger branded an "evil money-grabber", her face superimposed on the body of a rat and photos of her doctored into multiple, sexualised images.

Badenoch argued that Bonehill-Paine had renounced his past as a self-described "nationalist, fascist, theorist and supporter of white rights" and now works to prevent others succumbing to what he calls the disease of antisemitism. In April, he published a lengthy account of how he had come to see Jews as the malign, all-powerful "force operating behind events", a text that contains some useful insights. Though candid, the essay is not wholly reassuring. For one thing, it contains no apology to Berger or any of Bonehill-Paine's other victims.

Still, even if Bonehill-Paine's disavowal of his past were wholly convincing and he should be regarded as fully rehabilitated, that doesn't make it obvious that he is acceptable for public office. The bar for that is higher, a point Badenoch herself implicitly conceded when she hinted that Bonehill-Paine would not have cleared the threshold to become an MP. Serving as a councillor was different, she explained, as he would be responsible for nothing more than "parking and bins" – thereby insulting the thousands of Conservatives who devote themselves to public service. Bonehill-Paine eventually withdrew his candidacy, but that did not draw a line under the episode. In her stubbornness, Badenoch said he would now serve the party as an adviser, giving him a role on the very national level she had earlier said was off limits.

What a mess to have made in just a few days. If it were only tactical blunders and misjudgments, one might be more forgiving. But the flaw is strategic. Badenoch has chosen to fight a race to the bottom against Reform, but it is a race she can never win. Take that latest proposal on housing. She would give foreign nationals six months to get out of their homes; Reform promises to boot them out in three. The penny has still not dropped that in a contest of Reform v Reform Lite, the real thing will always have the edge.

All the while, moderate Tory voters grow more disenchanted. There may be room for ex-fascists in Conservative ranks, but the leader will allow no place for Conservatives who support net zero targets and do not want the UK to leave the European convention on human rights. The result is that those "blue wall", southern Tories who defected to the Lib Dems in 2024 have every reason not to come back.

So, yes, Kemi Badenoch may score a win now and then; she's bound to land the odd blow on Andy Burnham when normal hostilities resume in September. But a Keminaissance? For the Tories, it looks like the dark ages have a while to run yet.

The Guardian
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'Comment is free... but facts are sacred' CP Scott

Jason Arday

Diversity advocates must stand firm in the face of Cambridge's failures

Jason Arday's resignation from the University of Cambridge on Wednesday marked a full stop of sorts, but not an end to the furore surrounding his promotion to a professorship at the age of 37. Academic colleagues have demanded, with justification, that an investigation into his appointment to the faculty of education in 2023, and the subsequent fallout, should include people from outside the university. Allegations of plagiarism and claims made by Mr Arday about his background, career and charity fundraising remain under scrutiny. The memoir for which he said he had received a huge advance, billed as a triumph over adversity including an early autism diagnosis, is scheduled to appear later this month. His publisher, Simon & Schuster, ought to pause while inquiries run their course.

But several things are already clear. By failing to do due diligence on Mr Arday before launching him, with fanfare, as Cambridge's youngest-ever black professor, and through its inadequate response to later challenges, the university has done a serious disservice to black and neurodivergent scholars more widely. It has also set back the efforts of all the people and groups who have worked in good faith, over many years, to boost the presence of underrepresented groups in influential positions.

Such imbalances, which remain pronounced in many areas of public life, including academia, are the consequence of prejudices and discrimination, as well as unequal access to resources and opportunities. The glee with which some rightwingers have pounced on Mr Arday's fall from grace is not solely due to relish in his exposure – or the angst among liberals that this provokes. It is because they want to stoke a sense of grievance among white supporters, and to pour scorn on diversity initiatives across the board.

Such efforts to discredit policies aimed at supporting autistic people, and those from ethnic minorities, to achieve their full potential must be strenuously resisted. With hindsight, it seems extraordinary that details of Mr Arday's remarkable life story were not examined sooner. He was wrong to report a Times Higher Education journalist, Jack Grove, to the police, on the basis of a series of emailed queries. But Mr Arday is an individual. While there are lessons to be learned from his over-hasty ascent, the answer is not to give up on equity as a goal.

The scandal comes at a bad time in more ways than one. Rightwing parties continue to make hostility to migrants part of their core offer to voters, and will seek to capitalise on what will be presented as "Black Lives Matter gone mad". But consequences within the academy must be taken seriously too. Universities are under massive strain owing to funding shortfalls, which have been worsened by new limits and levies on international students. Some are at risk of going bust, and the reputational blow to the sector inflicted by this scandal can only make the situation worse.

The discipline of sociology, already a target of intellectual conservatives who dislike its radical roots, may also see adverse effects, as its standards are questioned. Needless to say, Cambridge colleges will be relatively insulated from such collateral damage, which is likely to be most severe at less wealthy universities with less privileged intakes. This is a grim irony, and one that should prompt serious self-reflection by an elite institution that should have known better than to be so careless.

Gianni Infantino

In the interests of the game he professes to love, Fifa's president should go

"How did you go bankrupt?" a character is asked in Ernest Hemingway's novel The Sun Also Rises. "Gradually, then suddenly" comes the reply. Right now, Fifa's justly besieged president, Gianni Infantino, is experiencing something similar in relation to the loss of his own authority.

Since taking over the running of world football's governing body in 2016, Mr Infantino has survived regular criticism of a monetising approach which has often come at a sporting cost. But since egregious plans to sell a stake in the World Cup to the brother of Donald Trump's son-in-law were leaked to the media, his credibility has been draining away at speed.

After crisis talks this week at Fifa's lavish new African headquarters in Rabat, Mr Infantino authorised a half-hearted and incomplete apology, acknowledging that the now aborted project "could have been handled differently". But it is very hard to imagine how a sell-off to private equity that would have imperilled the governance of the world's most popular sport (and possibly led to Mr Infantino's personal enrichment) could have been handled well. This was, simply, a betrayal of the game's interests by the president of an organisation that already sits on billions of pounds worth of reserves.

Mr Infantino should resign. But despite crushing condemnation of his actions from senior Fifa figures, and football greats such as Arsène Wenger and Luís Figo, he appears determined to brazen out the storm. As a result, what happens now looks like becoming increasingly messy. Over the course of 10 years, Fifa's president has carefully cultivated allies in the global south. Breaking ranks with their regional federation, Mexico and Argentina yesterday joined African nations in expressing support for his continued leadership.

Much will therefore depend on European football's governing body, Uefa. On Thursday it responded witheringly to Mr Infantino's attempt to draw a line, and restated a loss of confidence in his presidency. Yesterday, Norway became the first federation to call directly for Fifa's president to stand down. The next step will be to follow through on a threat to boycott Fifa-run competitions, starting with the Under-20 Women's World Cup due to be held in Poland next month.

That, clearly, would be a very serious move. But it was a serious abuse of power to negotiate a deal mortgaging the World Cup's future to speculators seeking to extract even more wealth from it. From the dubious award of the 2022 World Cup to Qatar, to Fifa's suspension of inconvenient red cards, Mr Infantino is used to provoking and ignoring controversies. This one must come with consequences.

With haughty presumption, the statement from Mr Infantino's Rabat bunker said the organisation "will no longer tolerate any attacks on its integrity, good governance and due process". The chutzpah is almost impressive. But really, dream on. Unless Fifa's president resigns, is forced out, or is ousted via an election next March, the global game is in danger of descending into an ugly civil war – all because of one man's attempt to sell off the family silver in unprecedented fashion. Mr Infantino was much mocked for his "Today I feel gay ... today I feel [like] a migrant worker" response to critics prior to the Qatar World Cup. It would be greatly to the benefit of the sport he professes to love if he could show some self-awareness now.

Ours is a world in turmoil – and Xi is taking full advantage of it

Simon Tisdall

Imagine what would happen if a British PM in London told the Scots they could not have their own parliament, football team or fly the saltire. Or if the Welsh were told their language was banned and must no longer be taught in schools. The ensuing uproar would probably destroy the United Kingdom. Yet that's exactly what Xi Jinping, China's communist emperor, is telling the roughly 125 million members of the 55 ethnic and religious minorities who together comprise about 9% of the country's population.

Xi claims his sinicisation policy, embodied in a new "ethnic unity" law, will boost national identity and integration and, by expanding compulsory use of Mandarin, improve life and work prospects. Minorities should "hug tightly like pomegranate seeds" to build a strong, united China, he says. But Tibetans, Mongolians, Uyghurs and others fiercely object to what they see as forced assimilation into an monoculture dominated by the Communist party's tunnel vision. For them, it's ethnic cleansing by another name.

The law has been condemned, though not too loudly, by western governments, and more vociferously by rights organisations such as Amnesty International. The death of Lobga Rangzen, a Free Tibet activist who set himself on fire in protest outside the UN in New York last month, briefly drew international attention. But such tragedies are not new. Wholesale repression in Tibet and brutal "re-education" camps in Xinjiang are but two longstanding aspects of Xi's intensifying nationwide war on dissent, difference and diversity. The law and its penalties, which extend to Chinese citizens based abroad, adds legal weight to existing efforts to enforce his and the party's will by creating a compliant, cowed population that dare not answer back.

A debilitating fatalism has taken hold in the west about China's behaviour, whether it involves persecution of minorities, evisceration of democracy in Hong Kong, prosecutions of pro-democracy activists such as the former Apple Daily publisher Jimmy Lai, or suppression of independent Christian churches and "unapproved" religious groups. It's as though Xi's China is now seen as simply too big, too economically powerful and too militarily threatening to influence, let alone contain or control. When China's internal affairs are the issue, it's easier to steer clear. Awkwardly balancing trade against security, and culpably silent on human rights, Britain is far from alone among western democracies in failing to articulate a coherent position.

But Xi's increasingly uncompromising policies are not confined to domestic matters. In power for nearly 15 years, Xi, 73, is growing ever more confident in pursuit of his legacy bucket list: establishing China as the dominant global power, relegating the US to second place and making his country the hub of a new multipolar security, economic and diplomatic order. His list includes a takeover of Taiwan before he stands down and unchallenged supremacy across the Asia-Pacific region. It all points one way: to Xi's coronation as the greatest Chinese leader since Mao Zedong.

With the 21st party congress approaching, 2027 could be a big year for Xi – and his dictatorship looks unassailable. Top regime cadres, meeting this week in secretive conclave at the Beidaihe resort in Hebei province, are expected to endorse his drive to enforce loyalty and discipline in the ranks – the official phrase is "sustained advancement of full and rigorous party self-governance". The Beidaihe gathering, and another meeting due in October, come amid almost Stalinist purges of senior political and military figures.

* **Simon Tisdall** *is a Guardian foreign affairs commentator*

"He is growing more confident in pursuit of his legacy bucket list, establishing China as the dominant global power, relegating the US to second place

Signs of a more assertive posture are everywhere. In recent months, China has stoked nationalist tensions with Japan and deliberately provoked the Philippines in disputed areas of the South China Sea. Its intimidation of Taiwan is unceasing. This week, Japan's latest defence white paper singled out China as presenting "an unprecedented strategic challenge" and warned the threat was moving closer to home. Admiral Samuel Paparo, head of US Pacific Command, fired a broadside at China's "coercive actions" in pursuit, he said, of regional dominance.

Xi is now actively challenging the US and the west on several other fronts. China is reportedly planning to provide Iran with up to 400 shoulder-fired missiles and new air defence systems. It is already assisting Russia's aggression against Ukraine. And an emboldened Beijing is deploying the sort of trade weapons beloved of Donald Trump. Last year it restricted exports of vital rare earth minerals, to Washington's alarm. Only this week, China hit back at Trump's new tariffs by blocking sales of drone tech.

Xi's bullish stance owes much to Trump's trashing of the post-1945 global order, disdain for international law and national sovereignty and strained relations with traditional allies. Many now view the US as an unreliable partner. For China, Trump's shifting focus away from Asia and towards the western hemisphere is a golden opportunity to be exploited. That may be one reason why Xi has taken the unusual step of agreeing to visit Trump in Washington next month, so soon after their May meeting in Beijing.

The main focus of the summit is expected to be artificial intelligence, amid US worries that it is in danger of losing the AI race. According to Chinese commentators, at least, Trump asked for the meeting after China agreed AI partnerships with 28 countries, mostly from the global south. Talking about AI last month, Trump said: "Whoever wins that race is probably going to win, period." By which he presumably means win the 21st century's superpower crown.

The summit is likely to confirm the impression left by the last one: that Xi, outmanoeuvring Trump on Asia-Pacific security and Taiwan and winning trade and tech wars, is well on the way to fulfilling his ambition of gaining the upper hand over the US. Yet in the end, Xi is still an unelected autocrat who relies on force to stay in power. He's failing to deliver economically and young urban Chinese may not tolerate his old-school brand of authoritarianism indefinitely. Who knows? Perhaps his ethnic unity law may ultimately prove a step too far.

All should be on their guard. Xi may be morphing into an outright enemy while all eyes are on Iran, Gaza and Ukraine. Symbolically if not yet physically, a dangerously unconstrained Xi is shutting the door on peaceful coexistence, at home and abroad.

Donald Trump with Xi Jinping at Zhongnanhai garden in Beijing, 15 May 2026 PHOTOGRAPH: EVAN VUCCI/AFP/GETTY

They're just bikes for hire, but they speak to a divided city

Andy Beckett

The night belongs to Lime bikes in London this summer. Buses and tube carriages are boiling, cars crawl between low-traffic neighbourhoods and Thames Water roadworks, and pedestrians plod through the sticky heat. But Lime riders exist in a different, breezier realm: whirring along, chatting in pairs or blissfully alone, weaving through the city's tree-lined maze, choosing impulsively between destinations, rarely stopping for anything or anyone. "My favourite part of a night out is Lime-biking home," writes Annie Lord, a dating columnist and author, in Freewheeling: Essays on Cycling. "As I ride up a hill, the bike's electrics click … And, for a little while, I'm free."

According to the confidently expansive Californian company that owns Lime, Neutron Holdings Inc, the average age of its London riders is 34. With the capital's weather becoming warmer and drier, and social media and other online sources making more information about things riders could do instantly available, rented e-bikes seem to be a perfect tool to unlock the city's possibilities. Across the globe, they are changing urban life: speeding it up, connecting previously out-of-the-way places, and making many women feel safer at night. Where I live, in Hackney, once one of the capital's more isolated boroughs and now one of the busiest markets for Lime, many pubs are enjoying a bike-driven boom on summer nights, with the bright green bikes glowing outside like lurid cocktails before their riders wobble home.

Yet since Limes became available in London and other British cities in 2018, the narrative has focused on their negative impacts. The way their riders often run red lights and cycle on pavements. How the bikes are often dumped in pedestrian spaces after use, blocking entrances and vulnerable people's safe routes. The fact that riders sometimes don't share space considerately with traditional cyclists, and take over footpaths in parks. The strong sense that some Lime users can barely cycle at all. A 2023 report commissioned by Lime found that "20% of Lime riders in London had never cycled before". That is not as straightforwardly positive a statistic as the company likes to think.

Other data about Lime bikes usage is hard to come by, as the company considers such information to be commercially sensitive. But research from the local government body Transport for London suggests Limes are disproportionately responsible for injuries to pedestrians. It estimates that in 2024, about 12% of the capital's cycling journeys were made on rented e-bikes, of which Lime is by far the biggest provider, yet rented bikes were reportedly responsible for almost a third of cyclist collisions with pedestrians that required police intervention. As anyone who walks much in London knows, Limes have changed the experience of crossing a road.

In truth, the Lime phenomenon is both an imposition and a liberation; an improvement to city life, and a sign of its sometimes alienating intensification; an expression of a certain kind of urban privilege (a half-hour ride in London can cost more than £10), and evidence of its diminution. It shows how the relationship has changed between mobility and property, especially among the young.

> **Many e-bike riders are young professionals who in the past would have lived near the best public transport. Nowadays that is unaffordable**

In 1975, Peter Ambrose and Bob Colenutt, two far-sighted British analysts of urban places, wrote in their book, The Property Machine: "The city is a zone of conflict between competing claims for land." In today's London, as in other cities where space is sought-after and expensive, many Lime bike riders are young professionals, who in the past would have owned or rented homes close to the best public transport. Nowadays, that is unaffordable for most of them, as is property ownership of any kind – as demonstrated by the fact that the age of the average first-time buyer in London has recently overtaken that of the average Lime bike rider, at 35.

Electric bike rental, whether for commuting or pleasure, is a solution to the scattering of these people to the capital's less-connected suburbs. Young Lime riders in a hurry, you could say, represent the revenge of a generation priced out of living near tube stations. Meanwhile, some of those who complain about Lime users are older Londoners who were able to buy properties in more convenient locations. They say Lime bikes are starting to dominate the city, but in reality, late-20th-century homebuyers have a much deeper hold on the capital.

Tensions between the groups can be reduced. This year, Hackney council says it has "worked with Lime … to install a high density of dedicated parking bays for the bikes, and compliance [by riders] is generally good". To discourage riders from running lights, a practice Lime's critics claim is encouraged by its policy of charging by the minute, the council has also agreed a flat fee with Lime for local residents: £1.75 for trips of up to 25 minutes that start in the borough, the same price as a bus fare, and the lowest Lime rate in London. Amid all the acrimony about rental bikes, it's often forgotten – deliberately so by the much more powerful motoring lobby – that in polluted cities with unequal public health, more cycling is good.

Yet a collaborative, responsible rental culture involving Lime, its customers and the overworked local authorities tasked with regulating the sector is some way off. Partly this is because of commercial pressures: despite having big investors such as Uber, Lime is heavily in debt and not yet profitable as a company. Meanwhile, as with many tech-enabled enterprises, key aspects of its business model have social costs. "People love the flexibility of being able to start and end their journey anywhere" said Andrew Savage, one of the senior executives of Lime, last year. What he would not – could not – acknowledge was that absolute convenience for his customers can mean inconvenience for everyone else. As usual last night, despite Hackney's ban on leaving Lime bikes anywhere but official parking bays, someone left one blocking some of my road.

Unless divided, expensive cities like London build more affordable homes, provide even more public transport, and make bike ownership less vulnerable to criminals – in other words, make mobility and housing less competitive and hierarchical – the sometimes petty, sometimes dangerous rental bike wars are likely to carry on. But at least we won't all be stuck in cars.

Lime-branded rental e-bikes left in Westminster; parking regulations vary from borough to borough PHOTOGRAPH: AMER GHAZZAL/ALAMY

Are you cursed or just unlucky? Ask Ted Lasso

Helen Pilcher

As the new season of Ted Lasso started, I was reminded of one of the show's stranger storylines. When Dani "Football is life!" Rojas gets injured, his teammates blame it on a curse said to haunt the treatment room. Absurd? Perhaps. But sports curses aren't just plot devices. Football is fertile ground for stories of mysterious forces, blamed for everything from missed penalties to decades of failure.

Take Mayo's Gaelic football team. After they won the All-Ireland title in 1951, the story goes that a local priest cursed them, declaring they would not win another final until every member of that team had died. Over the next 75 years, Mayo reached 11 more finals – and lost them all. Paddy Prendergast, the last surviving member of the 1951 squad, died in 2021. Then Mayo made it to the final again last month and won. This prompted the Canadian prime minister Mark Carney, who has family ties to Mayo, to announce on X: "The curse is broken."

Birmingham City – a team close to my heart – has its own curse story. It is said to have endured decades of disappointment after a 100-year hex was placed on its home ground in 1906. And this year, Harry Kane missed a close-range chance in England's World Cup match against Ghana, shortly after a "witch-doctor" claimed to have cast a spell on him. Coincidence?

There are, of course, many possible explanations. Maybe supernatural forces really *were* at work. Maybe the teams had bad luck, made tactical errors or were simply beaten by better opponents. Or maybe, once the curse became part of the team's folklore, it acquired a life of its own. In this scenario, it doesn't matter whether "spells" were ever cast, or whether players personally believed in them. What matters is that the idea gained a cultural foothold. Retold by fans, journalists and commentators, the stories shaped expectations about what might happen next. And expectations can have very real effects.

Psychology has a name for the power of negative expectations: the nocebo effect. The phenomenon is best known in medicine. A person takes a placebo pill but is warned it may cause side-effects. Often, they experience them anyway. The symptoms are real, even though the tablet isn't causing them. The same principle can play out in sport. Philip Hurst and colleagues at Canterbury Christ Church University have shown that when runners are given an inert supplement but told it will negatively affect their sprint performance, they run slower. Give them the same supplement but tell them it will improve their performance, and it has little effect. This hints at the idea that in sport, negative expectations may have more of an impact than positive ones.

Now, imagine a player walking on to the pitch. A "curse", a run of defeats or a throwaway comment can all plant seeds of doubt. Then every misplaced pass, heavy touch or missed chance can seem like proof that something is off. Confidence falters. A game that once felt instinctive becomes something to overthink, until doubt itself starts to undermine performance.

What begins in one player's mind can become a team-wide narrative. Players absorb cues from team members, supporters, critics and the media. Psychologists call this social contagion: the spread of emotions, behaviours and beliefs through groups. Over time, these shared beliefs can shape how a team responds under pressure. The result is a feedback loop: the story shapes expectations, expectations shape behaviour, and behaviour can appear to confirm the original story. But how do you break the cycle?

Perhaps we can learn a thing or two from Ted Lasso and the real-life managers who faced similar scenarios. Lasso's solution was a late-night cleansing ritual, with players throwing treasured possessions into a container which he set alight. Meanwhile Birmingham City's Barry Fry tried a more "fluid" approach, by urinating on the pitch's four corners.

Whether these rituals had any mystical power is beside the point. Their value was psychological. They created a reset – a chance for the team to start expecting a brighter future. For Mayo, that reset has finally arrived. The next generation of players will inherit a different memory – not of the final they could never win, but of the one they finally did. As former Mayo player Colm Boyle put it after their victory: "The shackles are off." The curse may only have been a story, but now Mayo can tell a different one.

✻ **Helen Pilcher** *is a science writer and the author of Life Changing: How Humans are Altering Life on Earth, and This Book May Cause Side Effects*

Arday affair has much to say about academia

Yes, the recent Jason Arday scandal should be a wake-up call to the left, as Jason Okundaye suggests (The right made DEI a weapon, and the left just let it happen, 6 August), but it should also be a wake-up call to anyone who cares about university systems and protocols around appointment and promotion.

What I have seen at UK universities suggests that Arday was not simply an individual who slipped through the net, but that university systems often fail to detect or challenge exaggerated claims. If anything, those with greater institutional privilege are more likely to get away with exaggerations, embellishments and even falsehoods on their CVs and promotion applications.

I have witnessed and reported on what appeared to be falsehoods in promotion applications with no repercussions; in fact, in both cases the applicants were promoted (and both were white). In one case, an applicant claimed to have given several keynote addresses, while conference websites indicated that he had been only an ordinary conference speaker. In another, an applicant claimed to be a co-author of a book when she was listed as a "data collection contributor".

Why, after I highlighted inaccurate claims, were these people still promoted? I cannot say. But from speaking with colleagues at other universities, this is far from unusual. Those willing to stretch the truth can rely on overworked colleagues with little time to factcheck and a system depending heavily on applicants' honesty.

This lack of accountability is grossly unfair on the many academics who report honestly on their accomplishments and do excellent work without resorting to such tactics. Perhaps the pressure to meet increasingly demanding and sometimes unattainable standards is driving this behaviour.

The number of permanent academic jobs has not kept pace with the number of PhD graduates, and competition for academic posts has intensified. Nevertheless, we need more checks and verifiable criteria to help prevent future scandals and to restore confidence in academic integrity.

Name and address supplied

● The case of Prof Jason Arday is an important insight into the academic world. Public expectation of academia and its most prestigious institutions is that these are purely meritocratic. In my experience this is not the case. One of the questions we should be asking is why an academic would be moved to fabricate a CV? Academic pressures can be intense, as evidenced by the needless suicide of Prof Stefan Grimm in 2014.

Furthermore, low-level racism is common in the university setting, in which there is a "chumocratic" culture that promotes similar or like-minded individuals. Ethnic minorities, or those who question the establishment, may be excluded from reaping the full benefits of their academic endeavours in an environment in which career-defining decisions such as promotion, publication and grant success are subjective.

At present, pending full investigation, it may be unclear if Jason Arday is perpetrator or victim, but the academic environment in which he has operated is unlikely to be completely blameless.

Salim Khakoo
Professor of hepatology, University of Southampton

> **It may be yet unclear if Arday is perpetrator or victim, but the academic environment is unlikely to be entirely blameless**
>
> **Prof Salim Khakoo**

● Jason Arday's story has divided opinion among my friends and associates, and Okundaye's piece articulates why. Whether the accusations of plagiarism or lying hold up, only time will tell. But in the meantime, a man and his family are in an intolerable position.

What troubles me equally is the frame surrounding Arday before any of this surfaced: the youngest Black professor in Cambridge's history, a story of triumph over adversity. That framing is seductive – it's the stuff that films are made of – but it sets a trap. It suggests Black excellence is only coherent when it becomes a redemption story. But that isn't equal opportunity; equality doesn't require anyone to be a miracle.

I don't know if Arday lied. I'm not signing petitions declaring the allegations "entirely false". But I will still buy his book, because I think he has been let down by more than himself.

Memuna Forna
London

● Here's what I think Jason Arday represents: an obsession among liberal Britain with Black people's "inspiring stories"; a man for whom making things up became a sad habit, and what happens when you become trapped in it; a reminder that, depressingly, the path to flourishing while Black is to be better than perfect, and some people will never believe you're there by merit; and how a victim of a coordinated campaign can be taken down. All these points are true. It's a sad story.

Colton Richards
London

● I really appreciated the down-to-earth sanity of Jason Okundaye's piece on the case of Jason Arday. So much hype, so much spiteful sniping, seldom thoughtful or without an agenda. Underneath it all, I can't help feeling that Cambridge University did little to cover themselves in glory.

However, I suspect that few have thought about Jason Arday, the person, and what he might be going through. I feel a sense of admiration for him, without being in a position to judge any of the allegations made against him. Some compassion would go a long way.

Linda Rhead
Hampton, London

● It is a deeply concerning to hear of the resignation of Prof Jason Arday, a huge loss. Your report (6 August) refers to the Guardian's own investigation, with revelations that this professor may have inflated his running achievements and overstated threats to his personal safety. On the former, instances of much more egregious displays of ego in academia are far from rare, without any apparent damage to the standing or careers of many professors.

On the latter, one has to ask what it takes for an institution to act to protect Black staff and students. Experiences of racism are far from unusual, and the psychological toll they take is well documented. Rather than undermine those who seek help in the face of abuse, the Guardian might wonder: what does it take to make us listen and understand?

Dr Isabel Shutes
London School of Economics and Political Science

● Within higher education, Jason Arday is well known for the kindness he promotes; many thousands of the students and staff he has encountered over the years will attest to this. In today's world – particularly within the context of recent coverage surrounding Arday – the significance of this should not be underestimated.

The accusations against Arday raise many polarising and contentious issues, and debates will no doubt continue for some time. In all of this, I urge commentators and commenters to remember the principles of respect and humanity, not to mention kindness.

Name and address supplied

Off the leash and ready to party

'Coco and Bagel looking forward to accompanying our 16-year-old nephew to his prom'

LOUISE CORLETT/GUARDIAN COMMUNITY

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Participatory games aren't for everyone

Oh how I do so agree with Emily Watkins in her article on participatory games (Games have no place in adult society. I would ban them for anyone over 12, 1 August). Do people not know and appreciate the sentiments of the poem Leisure by WH Davies, which begins with: "What is this life if, full of care, / We have no time to stand and stare"? Why the restless urge to pursue some activity with others rather than engage in the art of conversation or simply enjoy the pleasure of one's own company?

My local park, which is a lovely green space with a duck pond and where I like to walk with my dog most days, is taken over on a Sunday morning by folk engaging in a parkrun. Help ma boab, whatever next? They can't even manage to canter around on their own if that be their thing. Oh no, it has to be an organised event in the company of others, with stewards shouting encouragement to them as they circumnavigate the park following each other like lemmings. No wonder Anthony Newley sang Stop the World – I Want to Get Off.

Janet Knowlson
Perth

● Anyone who professes to hate games in any shape or form has clearly been subjected to the worst kinds: interminable games of Monopoly at Christmas (with the wrong rules), Trivial Pursuit with family members who seem to know everything, and Cards against Humanity – a race to the bottom of rudeness and impropriety.

Modern, simple tabletop games are the ultimate ice-breaker and way to make bonds in this digital age. No one needs to feel inferior or superior; for many people they are just a great way to spend an hour or two with friends and family. Try Flip 7, Just One or Wavelength for entertaining, accessible modern games.

Peter Hazlewood
Calne, Wiltshire

I love football, so I support lots of clubs

I read Luke McLaughlin's article with a great deal of empathy, yet still with some uneasiness about the taboo of having more than one club (Ever switched your football allegiances? Do not be ashamed, you are not alone, 1 August). A world I inhabit.

I too was at the Millwall v Forest game marred by crowd trouble. It was my first! My family are mostly Millwall, who remain my club, but having seen them drop down the divisions and play in the third tier, my head was turned by better technique and Tottenham- and Arsenal-supporting friends. They will never understand my soft spot for both clubs.

Not to mention family in Germany giving me a Freiburg shirt, making them my German team. Then the gift of a Champions League ticket at Celtic Park put another team in the mix, so I'm checking a lot of scores. Now in the Borders, I am agitating to see Gala Fairydean Rovers this season. They will be yet another team for me to keep an eye on.

To this day, when people ask me which team I support, I pause sheepishly and say, "Millwall but…". I suppose I just love football!

Michael Opitz
Kelso, Roxburghshire

● Over the course of his life, a man could well change his wife owing to personal choice or events outside his control. It is quite likely that his political views will sway depending on the ineptitude of governing parties or his own finances. His religious persuasion may be amended or completely turned off. But he must never, ever, change his football allegiance, particularly for the heinous crime of glory-hunting, else he shall always be known as a plastic fan.

Neil Bage
Bourne, Lincolnshire

Let's all get on board with travel etiquette

Re your article on travel etiquette ('It's not an extension of your sitting room', 4 August), it's totally wrong to advise people not to give up seats for a woman any more. Women could be menstruating, in the first trimester of pregnancy (the most exhausting time, and not one you advertise with badges saying "Baby on board"), perimenopausal, menopausal or have endometriosis (excruciating pain). Women live with a level of pain and discomfort as routine, for much of their lives. Yes, of course men can be suffering with specific ailments at specific times, but it is not part and parcel of being a man. Gentlemen, please just do it.

Helen Walker
London

● To your list of dubious travel behaviours, I'd like to add constant sniffing and its more guttural and nauseating relation, snorting. It seems that handkerchiefs, tissues and even the concept of blowing your nose have gone out of fashion. I am frequently nauseated by this on planes and trains, and if I don't have headphones with me I have to resort to blocking my ears. I have not yet had the courage to speak to a culprit (although I have often been tempted to pass them a tissue).

Judith Milburn
Hartlepool, County Durham

Corrections and clarifications

● Questions 1 and 6 in Alex Bellos's puzzles (25 July, Puzzles summer special, p2) involved extra head-scratching as the answers were accidentally transposed (1 August, p52). Also, we jumbled the order in which answers to first lines from books were given.

● It was in 2014, not 2022, that the theme park company Puy du Fou expressed concerns about a company reorganisation (French bidder's links to Putin-backing oligarch revealed, 1 August, p44).

● Alabama Shakes bassist Zac Cockrell was absent from the band's interview in Leeds as he was in Nashville, not asleep as the article speculated (Blue sky thinking, 18 July, Saturday magazine, p33).

Editorial complaints and corrections can be sent to guardian.readers@theguardian.com or The readers' editor, **Kings Place, 90 York Way, London N1 9GU**. You can also leave a voicemail on **020 3353 4736**

My rage against the tinkling wind chimes

Your article on the pensioner who fought a morally unimpeachable battle of self-defence against intrusive noise which sadly caused the death of some fish in collateral damage (Koi killer 'was driven insane' by neighbour's fish pump, 5 August) reminded me of my rage against a neighbour's incessantly tinkling wind chimes. Not knowing the applicable statute of limitations, I will only say that the restoration of silence was swift, secret, decisive, and resulted in no harm to any fish.

Stephen Smith
Glasgow

● Thank goodness for Zoe Williams: brave enough to break ranks with those dancing around the ugly reality of Rod Liddle, whose mean-spirited, fulminating bigotry will be remembered by just as many as are now excusing his poisonous utterances as some sort of brave iconoclasm (I knew Rod Liddle. What did he become?, 7 August).

Paul McGilchrist
Cromer, Norfolk

● Your "short illness" letters (4 August) remind me that my late Dundonian father used to say people were in hospital because they were either "no' weel", "no' awfy weel", "awfy no' weel" or "needin' awa".

Peter Jamieson
Dumfries

● If Malcolm Rivers wants to save his strawberry crop (Letters, 5 August), he only needs to suspend the fruit above ground level. Woodlice aren't brilliant climbers.

Alan Pearson
Broadbottom, Greater Manchester

Established 1906

Country diary
Abernethy

Parts of the Cairngorms have been on fire for over three weeks. Huge swathes of moorland that should be purple with heather, understoreys that should be thick with blaeberries, granny pines and younger trees, are scorched black. In places, the fires has burned down into the tree root system and the peat layer, and may smoulder for weeks.

It's been a period of uncertainty and despair. I'll never forget the day the wind changed direction and a huge plume of smoke rose behind the trees immediately beyond our house. We waited to see if we would be evacuated, gathered passports, important documents, medicines, and packed a bag of clothes. When residents of nearby Nethy Bridge were advised to evacuate, we stayed with a friend just outside the perimeter for the night, something I never imagined having to do.

By now, 25 square kilometres have burned; the equivalent of 3,500 football pitches. I watch a video shot from a helicopter flying over the fire's path and recognise An Lochan Uaine, the green lochan Nan Shepherd so eloquently described, and the gully where I spotted merlins. The Cairngorms as a whole holds 25% of the UK's rare and endangered species.

We've had fires here before, of course. They change how you look at things. Having grown up in a country where rain is "bad weather", I've found myself in recent summers anxiously wishing for it, conscious of the dry forest. But this year's fire feels like a wake-up call. Home, a place of safety and security, feels more precarious now.

From day one, volunteers, gamekeepers from neighbouring estates and others have joined the RSPB and the fire service in fighting the flames. People have donated money for provisions, made food and shared information and reassurance. It's a strong community, and if we're heartbroken, we know that in time this will become a landscape of recovery – and we will have to consider our preparedness for future fires.

For now, we're grateful for the massive effort to contain it. This morning, the wind brought with it the smell of smoke, a reminder that it's not over yet.

Amanda Thomson

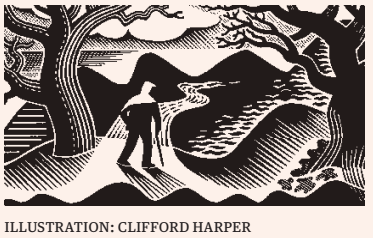


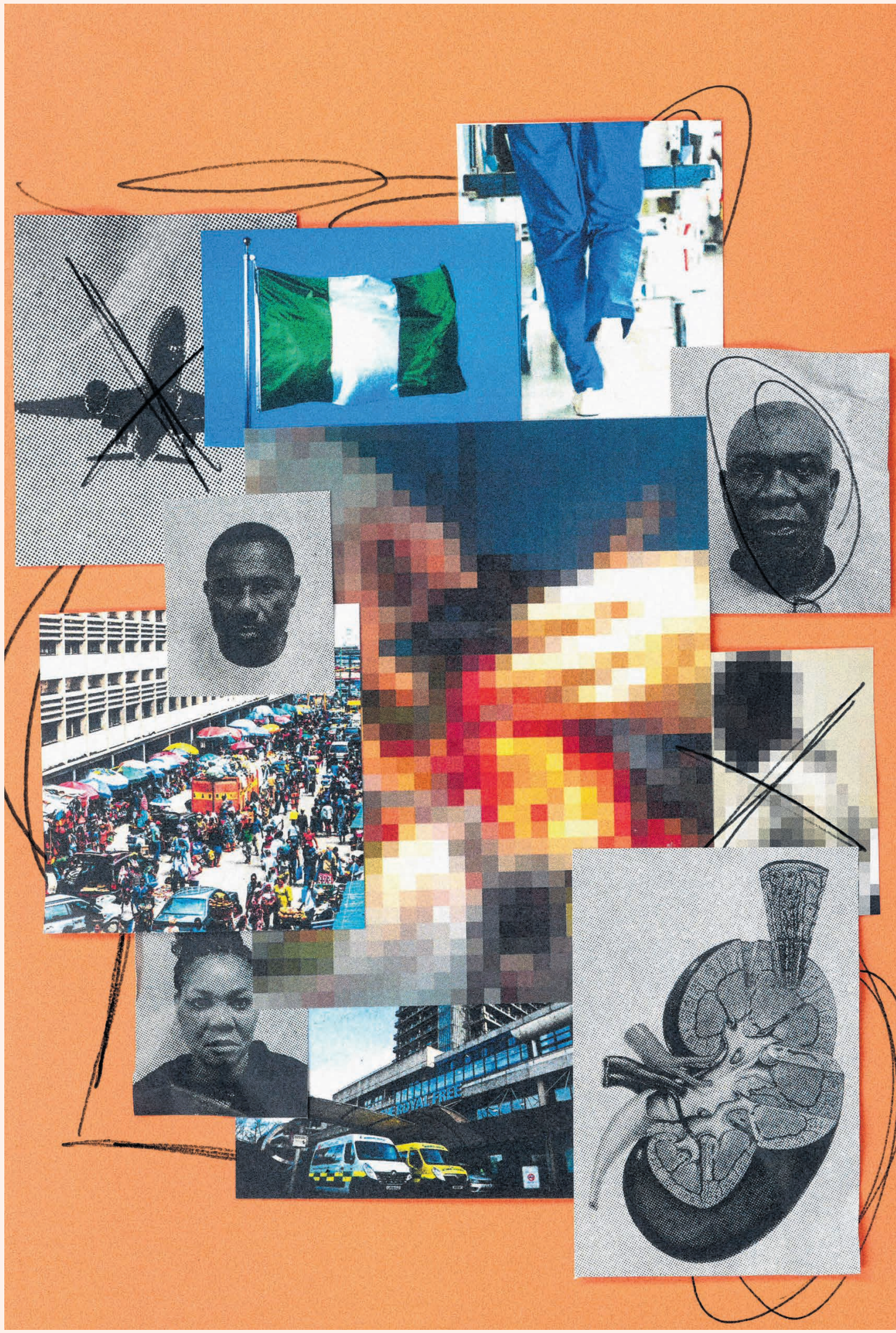
ILLUSTRATION: CLIFFORD HARPER

GUARDIAN DESIGN/GETTY IMAGES/IMAGE SOURCE/REUTERS/AFP/AP

The body snatchers

When a young Nigerian was lured to London, he had no idea he had been targeted for organ harvesting

Alexis Okeowo



Daniel arrived in Lagos for the first time in 2016. He had come from a village in Ebonyi, a state in south-eastern Nigeria. He was 15 years old, the eldest of nine siblings, and his parents were farmers. When he was a boy, his father became sick and Daniel started working to assist his family, helping to cut trees and clear land. A few years later, he decided to seek his fortune in Lagos.

In Nigeria's commercial capital, Daniel spent his days in the open-air Ikotun Market, where thousands of people shop every day for everything from tomatoes and fabric to suitcases and electronics. He sold cellphone accessories out of a wheelbarrow under a wide umbrella, making less than £10 a day. After living with a relative, he moved into a room with friends, including a young man named Chukwudi, who also worked in the market. Daniel had grown up in the same village as Chukwudi. A photo from their early childhood shows them together, Daniel in a red sportswear shirt.

Daniel was short and slight, with an unassuming face and sleepy eyes. He was playful and liked to joke around, Chukwudi recalled, "not a troublemaker". They often hung out with another friend from the market, Ben, who was older and carried himself like he was destined for better things. "Ben was living big boy life," Chukwudi told me. "He was balling out, flexing; he can go and eat anything he like."

One day in 2021, Ben disappeared from the market. He wouldn't be in touch again until later that year, when he called Daniel and told him the good news: he had got a job in the UK. "Wow, God has done for you then?" Daniel said. Ben asked if Daniel was interested in working abroad. Ben sent his friends videos of himself dancing in London, living the good life. He had accomplished the dream: he had escaped the dim economic prospects offered by his home country and got out. Daniel was interested in doing the same.

Soon after, Daniel received a call from a man named Obinna Obeta, who had got his number from Ben. Obeta said that he could help Daniel get to the UK, where he would provide him with accommodation and work. But first, he said, Daniel would need to go to Abuja, Nigeria's capital, to undergo some medical tests. Daniel wasn't sure what to make of this, until he received the money for his trip to Abuja. "That is the day that I knew he was serious," Daniel later told a court in London. He assumed the medical tests were part of the process for getting a visa.

In February 2022, Daniel said goodbye to Chukwudi at a bus station in Lagos and began his journey to Britain. He had never met Obeta in person. When later asked in court why he thought Obeta was helping him, he responded simply: "Because I think it's from God."

Obinna Obeta, the man who contacted Daniel, was a Nigerian radiologist who had moved to London to seek treatment for kidney failure. Nigeria suffers from high rates of kidney disease, but few have health insurance or can afford dialysis and medications. "Kidney disease treatment in Nigeria: people are just moving from here to the morgue. It's traumatising honestly," Obeta would later say. It was not until 2025 that Nigeria introduced comprehensive standards and guidelines for organ transplants, and only 2,000 or so kidney transplants have taken place there. Many Nigerians who have undergone organ transplants have done so abroad.

Even in countries with advanced healthcare systems, the wait time for a kidney can be long: two to three years, on average, in the UK, and up to five years or more in the US. According to the World Health Organization, organ transplant tourism – where patients travel abroad to purchase organs – accounts for at least 5% to 10% of transplants worldwide. Organ trafficking is believed to take place in about 50 countries, and it is one of the most under-reported forms of human trafficking. The UK considers moving people across international borders for the purpose of harvesting their organs a form of slavery, treating human beings as commodities to be bought and sold.

In July 2021, seven months before Daniel left for the UK, Obeta had undergone a successful kidney transplant at the Royal Free hospital in north London. It cost him £70,000. He used the services of a medical tourism company, run by a Nigerian doctor who was then an NHS consultant. The kidney donor was Daniel's friend Ben, whom Obeta had falsely claimed was his cousin.

On the flight to London, Daniel knew none of this. Accompanied by a man and woman he had not met before, he had only a few possessions: some clothes, lotion and soap. No shoes besides the ones on his feet. It was his first time on a plane, and he slept for much of the flight. After landing, the man took Daniel to a house off the Old Kent Road in south London, where he met Obeta for the first time. Daniel was told he would sleep in the living room.

As Daniel would later testify, Obeta treated him like a "houseboy". "Every day I wash plates, I wash toilet, I wash, I sweep," he recalled. Daniel did not have any money and was reliant on Obeta for his meals. Even his passport was taken. There seemed to be no escape.

Across London, in Willesden Green, Sonia Ekweremadu was getting sicker. Less than two months before Daniel arrived in the UK, she had posted an end-of-year recap reel on her Instagram page. It showed her, a light-skinned 24-year-old woman, dancing, going out with friends, and lying in a hospital bed with a pink teddy bear. Her family home was in Abuja but she lived in London, having attended various private schools in England. With several family properties in Nigeria, as well as in the US and UAE, she had the privileged upbringing that is typical of a Nigerian politician's child.

Sonia's father was Ike Ekweremadu, one of the most prominent and powerful figures in Nigeria. Ike Ekweremadu had been elected to the Nigerian senate for a fifth consecutive term in 2019, and served as deputy president of the senate. His reputation extended beyond national borders, after his stint as speaker of the parliament of the Economic Community of West African States in the 2010s.

It was while Sonia was studying for her master's degree in film at Newcastle University, in 2019, that she became sick. As she grew weaker, she had to drop out. A family friend eventually referred her to the Royal Free in Hampstead, which specialises in treating kidney disease. Sonia was diagnosed with FSGS nephrotic syndrome, a rare disease where kidney scarring leaks protein into the urine and causes bodily swelling. In August 2021, Sonia met with Peter Dupont, a consultant nephrologist at the Royal Free, who noted that she would require dialysis or a renal transplant. She received dialysis in a private patients' unit.

In September 2021, the court later heard, Sonia's uncle, Isaac "Diwe" Ekweremadu, who is a doctor, called an old medical school classmate to talk about the transplant that he had at the Royal Free that year. Diwe wanted to know whether his niece might be able to have a similar operation. His former classmate was Obinna Obeta.

At the time, Obeta was in desperate need of money. As a non-UK resident, he still owed £27,000 to the Royal Free as part of the £70,000 he was paying for his kidney transplant. He also had to spend £1,600 every month on immunosuppressants, so his body wouldn't reject the kidney, and other medications and tests. "It just kept increasing. Just kept increasing," he later said of his debt. For an initial sum of just under £2,000, Obeta agreed to help find a kidney donor for Sonia. He referred the Ekweremadus to the medical concierge service he had used for his own transplant. Soon after, Obeta got in touch with the young man who had provided him with his kidney, Ben, to ask for help finding a donor. Through him, he found Daniel.

By November 2021, Ike Ekweremadu had a solution for his daughter. He

Daniel had no money and was reliant on Obeta for his meals. Even his passport was taken. There seemed to be no escape

Ikotun Market in Lagos, Nigeria

NURPHOTO SRL/ALAMY

forwarded a message to his wife: Diwe had found a donor who "matched very well". The next step was to get the donor a passport and then a visa to the UK. Daniel had no idea that the following statement was written on his visa application:

"I wish to state on conclusion of this application that I would be donating an organ to my closest cousin (Sonia Chinonso Ekweremadu) in appreciation for her sacrifices towards me, my family, and our community. I'm willing to put my life on the line for her to live and continue her good service to humanity. Finally, I wish to state that I'll be travelling in company with my uncle, Obinna. He has been a father-figure since I lost my biological father."

None of this was true: Sonia was not a relative of Daniel's, nor was Obinna Obeta. He had never met them. His biological father was still alive. He had never discussed the prospect of organ donation with anyone.

Daniel arrived in London in February 2022. Before his arrival, Sonia's doctor at the Royal Free had written a letter to the Nigerian doctor who ran the concierge service, stating that she was not responding well to treatments and agreeing that a transplant would be the "best way forward for her". The family had informed the Royal Free that they had a candidate, telling them that Daniel was 19 and a distant cousin of Sonia's. The doctor added in his letter that this prospective donor was younger than he would consider ideal and, because he was not a close relative, there could be difficulties gaining approval from the hospital and the UK Human Tissue Authority.

In the UK, kidney transplants are highly regulated. If the donor is alive, they have to go through extensive physical and psychological evaluations to make sure they are medically suitable and willing to donate. Once the surgical team approves the donation, the Human Tissue Authority must interview both the donor and the recipient to determine whether the donor has given consent and to ensure that no payment or coercion is involved.

According to the court transcript, Diwe told Sonia's parents that they should now say that Daniel was her first cousin, not a distant one. He also later told them that there was a medical secretary at the hospital who would act as Daniel's interpreter. For a fee of £1,500, she had agreed to coach Daniel on what to say during the interview he'd need to do for his kidney donation to be approved. She recommended that Daniel be at the hospital during Sonia's dialysis treatments to show his firm commitment to his cousin's health.

The week of Daniel's arrival in London, Obeta took him to a west African restaurant on the Old Kent Road to have lunch with a young woman and an older woman. Daniel had no idea who they were, and testified that the women didn't ask him any questions about himself. They seemed afraid of something, he said. At the end of the lunch, the group took a photo. The two women were Sonia and her mother, Beatrice Ekweremadu.

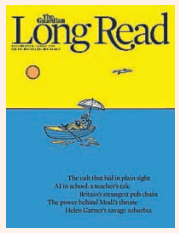
Later that week, Obeta took Daniel to the Royal Free, where he saw Sonia and Beatrice outside. Before Obeta began talking with them, he told Daniel to stand away so he could not hear. "Obinna would just tell me where to stay and he would go with them and they would start discussing. Like they was controlling me," Daniel testified. He was confused to learn that he would be meeting with a doctor. "They said if the doctor ask me the school that I go, I should tell the doctor that I go to higher institution," Daniel told the court. "If the doctor ask me who is Sonia, I should say that Sonia is my cousin. They give me many things to answer the doctor. I should tell the doctor that they not pay me."

On 24 February 2022, Daniel went in for a meeting with Peter Dupont, the consultant nephrologist at the Royal Free, while Obeta waited outside. "He told me that I want to do a kidney transplant," Daniel later recalled. "I was shocked because that is the first day that I hear about this kidney transplant." Dupont asked him about his relationship to Sonia and what had motivated him to be a donor; about whether he was working or studying; and about what his parents did for a living.

Daniel gave the answers he had been coached to provide. In court, Dupont recalled that Daniel had been subdued: "We spoke for perhaps 15 or 20 minutes. His answers were very brief: single sentences, single words. He didn't really appear to have any understanding of what it was that he was signing up for." Dupont explained that there were dangers associated with the procedure, such as excess bleeding, infections and blood clots, and "a small risk of death", as he wrote in his notes. Even if the operation went well, Daniel would have an increased risk of chronic kidney disease and end-stage renal disease. He would require regular follow-ups for the rest of his life to monitor his kidney function, blood pressure and urine protein levels.

Noticing Daniel's uneasiness, Dupont asked if he was scared to tell the Ekweremadus that he did not want to go ahead. Daniel said he did not want to donate his kidney. It was only when Dupont made clear that the operation would not happen that Daniel finally made eye contact, the doctor testified. "He was nervous that I would say or imply that the decision not to proceed was his fault. I assured him that confidentiality was paramount and the intended recipient would be told he was unsuitable." He recalled Daniel saying about Obeta: "He had not told me anything about this. I would never have agreed to any of this. My body was not for sale."

Afterward, Daniel told Obeta that he answered what questions he could, but there were some he could not.



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Ike Ekweremadu downplayed Daniel's vulnerability in court. 'Even a young person in Lagos cannot be intimidated,' he said

Ike Ekweremadu, March 2012 PIUS UTOMI EKPEI/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Obeta was angry. "He say that if I don't do this - he used Igbo language to say this - if I don't do this ... I will find it difficult," Daniel testified. (Obeta insisted to the court that he had discussed the kidney transplant with Daniel before the meeting.) Obeta also told Daniel that he had 1.2m naira, or about £2,000 then, for him if he went through with the operation.

At the end of March, the decision was taken out of their hands. The Royal Free formally ruled out the possibility of allowing Daniel's transplant operation to go ahead.

Daniel was relieved, but he was still living in limbo. He was not allowed to leave the house, and spent much of his time with Obeta's kids when he was not doing chores. A few weeks after the Royal Free declined to proceed with the operation, two people came to Obeta's house to examine Daniel. They asked him to remove his clothes and applied pressure to his stomach. They still wanted to do the transplant, Daniel said, and Obeta told Daniel he had booked him a flight back to Nigeria. Daniel was unsure what they had planned for him. "That is when I start to become afraid because I don't know what I am going to do. Because all the plans, everything they are doing is behind my back," Daniel testified.

As Daniel later told Chukwudi, his childhood friend, he had been in a state of panic. "He was even crying, he don't know what to do," Chukwudi recalled. "Even me, when he was telling me everything, I was crying. I didn't know what to do. Because if he comes back, he has nothing to do again. He has already sold his market [stock], he used the money to buy some clothes for his trip."

In court, Daniel and Obeta's accounts of what happened next differed in a few small ways. But the likeliest story is that on 2 or 3 May 2022, a friend of Obeta's took Daniel to Heathrow airport for a flight back to Abuja. But Daniel decided he could not go back to Nigeria, where he feared he would be coerced into donating his kidney. Despite carrying little more than a used Samsung phone, AirPods, chargers and £27.90 in cash, he fled. He ended up walking around for three days, sleeping outside. He then ran into a stranger on Kingston Road in Staines, who gave him food and let him take a shower in his flat.

On 5 May, Daniel went to nearby Staines police station, where he told officers a story that was mostly fictional. He said he had been begging for money on the streets of Lagos before coming to London, and that he was an orphan with no family in Nigeria. He told officers that the man he had travelled with had promised him money, but that he couldn't say what the money was for. He said he was only 15. (Daniel would later testify that he was trying to give the impression of being a vulnerable youth with nowhere to live in Lagos, so he wouldn't be deported.)

According to Chukwudi, who spoke to Daniel not long after he went to the station, a Nigerian woman hosted Daniel at her home when the police released him into protective care. On the call, Daniel still sounded afraid about the attempted kidney transplant, but he said the Nigerian woman was taking him to church. He thought he might even get the chance to go to school.

With Daniel now gone, the Ekweremadus needed a new plan. After consulting with friends and colleagues, they decided on a new transplant location: Turkey. While the Ekweremadus maintain that Sonia had no knowledge of the plan to illegally get a kidney donor, she responded to her father's WhatsApp messages that had photos of new potential donors. To one photo of two young Black men, Sonia wrote: "OK, that's fine. Thank you. Are they still more to test?"

Her father told her: "Yes, but by the end of the week, I will decide who to proceed with. We will get it right this time."

Sonia wrote back: "I trust you, daddy, thank you ❤". Then she added: "The dark one looks better, the light one looks like he'll run away 😂😂😂".

In June 2022, on Father's Day, Sonia wrote to her father on the family group chat: "Happy Father's Day, daddy, you mean the world to us ... You are the best father in the world. I know lots of people say that about

their fathers, but mine is really the best … I pray for long life and prosperity, to be able to see your grandchildren and great-grandchildren in Jesus' name. Amen. I want to especially thank you for everything you've done and are doing regarding this transplant process. You and mummy have gone above and beyond for me, and it never goes unnoticed and unappreciated … I hope that one day I'll be able to take care of you, and mummy, the way that you've taken care of us all these years (don't worry, I haven't forgotten your Range Rover gift)."

Ike replied: "I know you didn't forget, sweetheart … I will spare nothing to ensure your good health and comfort. I have the support of mummy on this objective 100%. By the grace of God, you will be out of this challenge before the end of August. It's a promise. Just be strong for all of us."

Two days later, Ike and Beatrice Ekweremadu were arrested at Heathrow as they travelled back from Turkey. They were charged with conspiracy to commit human trafficking for the purpose of exploitation, specifically organ harvesting. The couple had at least £30,000 in cash on them. Sonia was arrested the same day at her home in London. Obeta was arrested the next month. Sonia's uncle Diwe remained in Nigeria and was not extradited to the UK. (I was unable to reach Diwe for comment.)

It is extremely rare for a Nigerian politician of Ekweremadu's status to face criminal charges. In the UK, the story was widely covered in the media, but in Nigeria, the case attracted a different level of interest, dominating the front pages of newspapers and sparking discussions on primetime TV news, as well as endless social media posts and WhatsApp messages across both Nigeria and the diaspora. One of Daniel's uncles, Linus, who had given him a place to stay when he first came to Lagos, discovered his nephew's story on social media like everyone else. "If I had known, I wouldn't have allowed him to go," Linus told me.

On 6 February 2023, the trial of Obinna Obeta and Ike, Beatrice and Sonia Ekweremadu began at the Old Bailey in London. All pleaded not guilty. Ike claimed that he thought Daniel was donating a kidney to his daughter out of kindness, and that he never agreed to pay him. He accused Obeta of scamming him out of money, and he argued that Daniel had lied to the police so that he could get asylum in the UK. "D was never exploited, D accepted and agreed, volunteered to help my daughter with this kidney and we believed him," Ike told the court. "But looking back now it was obvious that he was scamming everybody, he just wanted to come to England and take refuge."

Ike downplayed Daniel's vulnerability. "Lagos is a place where you get wiser by the day for you to survive. So, even a young person in Lagos cannot be intimidated," he said in court. "Because they are just streetwise." When asked if he knew Daniel was selling phone accessories out of a wheelbarrow, he responded: "I didn't know in particular but that's also a big business, he'd make millions with that."

Ike did admit to fabricating the familial relationship to Daniel. "That is what Dr Obeta advised us," he said. "My daughter was sick, and somebody had told us what we would need to do, and we didn't see any corruption in this; we didn't corrupt anybody." (Contacted before publication of this article, the Royal Free declined to comment. After publication, it sent the following statement: "We would like to pay tribute to the victim for his bravery in coming forward and sharing his experience. National guidance for the clinical assessment of living donor transplantation, which applies to both our NHS and private patients, was followed in this case and a decision taken not to go ahead with the procedure.")

Both Ike and Beatrice kept saying during the trial that their lies to the Royal Free about Daniel's identity were "not who we are" – they were just desperate to save their daughter's life. "She was born premature, so we struggled to save her life from day one," the former senator said. He refused to admit any guilt. When asked if he was the victim in all this, Ekweremadu said: "Yes."

The trial shed more light on Obeta, who had obtained a UK medical visa for his own transplant and then stayed to work in the country illegally, getting a job as a cleaner during the pandemic. "It was amazing … I've never seen this kind of, you know, surgery skill," Obeta told the court of his transplant experience. "I want to use this opportunity to thank the people of the UK for saving my life."

The Royal Free hospital in north London

LEON NEAL/GETTY

Daniel's family was confused and hurt that he had disppeared from their lives, even though they understood he was afraid

On 23 March 2023, at the end of the six-week trial, Ike and Beatrice Ekweremadu were found guilty of organ trafficking. Ike was later sentenced to nine years and eight months; Beatrice to four and a half years. Sonia, who had also been charged with conspiracy to arrange organ harvesting, was acquitted. Obeta was convicted of organ trafficking and sentenced to 10 years. The Ekweremadu case was the first successful organ-trafficking conviction in the UK under the Modern Slavery Act.

After he testified in court via a video link in February 2023, Daniel vanished. The police had placed him in protective custody, and none of his family or friends in Nigeria knew where he was. He had told the court: "I have no one here [in the UK], no family or friends. I'm having to start my life again. I am wary of new people that come into my life now. My plan now is to work and to get an education and to play football."

In Lagos, in 2024, I met a childhood friend of Daniel's, Jeremiah Nwamkpuma. In a beige, shabby office upstairs from the stalls in Ikotun Market, we chatted over the noise of hawkers and shoppers. Nwamkpuma told me that he'd recently visited Daniel's dad in the family village. "[He] asked me about Daniel. I'm telling him that I'm not hearing from him. He's crying. Since Daniel left, he's not heard from him," Nwamkpuma said. "Tension is high in the family."

The family was confused and hurt that Daniel had disappeared from their lives, even though they understood that he, too, was likely afraid. His parents were angry, Nwamkpuma said. They farmed cassava, plantain, yam and other crops, but had little money. When Daniel was selling cellphones, he would send money back home to help them. "We're happy he's saved, but there's no proper communication," Jeremiah Mbah, who is the pastor of a church Daniel occasionally attended, told me. "It's as if he's lost."

For more than two years no one heard from Daniel, but then last year, he called from the UK. He reached Chukwudi, who was surprised and relieved. "He wanted to hear from me, and know how his parents are doing. I explained to him that his daddy is very sick, and that they needed him present. But he said there was no way for him to come. He was feeling bad," Chukwudi told me. In court, Daniel had said that he was concerned about his safety if he returned home. Ekweremadu "has a lot of people that know him. In Nigeria, those people can do anything." He asked Chukwudi to help with the cost of Daniel's father's care. "He told me that he was going to school. He sounded very good," Chukwudi said.

Daniel's father died last August. Nwamkpuma called him to let him know of the death. Daniel cried, Nwamkpuma recalled, but said that he still couldn't come because of his studies; Nwamkpuma told him to stay.

Chukwudi, Nwamkpuma and Daniel's family have tried to reach him since then, with no success.

After her parents were convicted, Sonia gave a short interview to the BBC. She looked poised, wearing understated gold jewellery, with her hair in braids. "It's sad. It's been really hard to really wrap my head around it," she said. "I understand the conviction, personally I disagree with it. However, that's from a very biased perspective as their daughter. I would obviously always, always back my parents. However, the law has taken its course, and we just have to now move forward as a family." She admitted she was aware "to an extent" of her parents' plan, but that she "didn't really know anything leading up to it". She added that she didn't "feel anything" towards Daniel, but wished him "all the best".

She was now in a precarious medical situation. "Either I stay on dialysis for the rest of my life, or I get a transplant; these are my two options," she said. She had visited her parents in jail, and said they seemed calm. "I feel guilty," she said, her voice breaking. "Because I feel like all this has happened because of me." (Sonia declined to comment for this article, but on her Instagram, she often posts stories with bible verses and prayers, as well as photos with friends.)

The Ekweremadu case is still the only successful conviction for organ trafficking under the Modern Slavery Act in the UK. There is a simple reason that such convictions are rare, particularly in Nigeria, says Frank Tietie, a human rights lawyer: "Those who are involved are usually very powerful people, and they're able to influence our justice system." While Ike Ekweremadu remains in prison, Beatrice was released in January, after serving the custodial portion of her sentence. Upon her return to Nigeria, local media reported that she was greeted with celebrations in her home town of Mpu.

Late last year, in a sign of Ike's continued status in his home country, Nigeria's foreign minister met with officials at the UK Ministry of Justice to request that he be returned to Nigeria to serve out the rest of his sentence there. The UK rejected the request. Nigeria has arrested and charged several other people with organ trafficking, but the trials have lagged. As Tietie said: "So it's still going on, largely unreported, largely unchecked." ●

Some names have been changed

✻ **Alexis Okeowo** *is the author of A Moonless, Starless Sky: Ordinary Women and Men Fighting Extremism in Africa, and Blessings and Disasters: A Story of Alabama*

Vicki Wickham

Journalist, producer, talent manager and driving force behind the 1960s pop music TV show Ready Steady Go!

"I was just in the right place at the right time," was Vicki Wickham's modest way of explaining, in 1999, her involvement in some of pop culture's great moments. Wickham, who has died aged 87, was a band manager, a journalist, a TV producer and a songwriter. She guided the careers of Dusty Springfield, Labelle and Marc Almond, wrote for the music paper Melody Maker, contributed to the teen magazine Fabulous, and assembled the talent for the groundbreaking pop music programme Ready Steady Go!

She also managed the "unmanageable" (his word) Morrissey, ran the New York office of the label set up by the Who's management, and co-wrote Springfield's biggest hit, You Don't Have to Say You Love Me.

The song, released in 1966, perhaps best embodied her ability to get stuck into a project and triumph, no matter her lack of experience. In its original form it had an Italian lyric, and needed an English translation. Springfield was reluctant to do it herself, "and I, like a bigmouth, said, 'Any fool can write lyrics'," Wickham recalled in a US radio interview in 2002.

Wickham and her friend Simon Napier-Bell, the Yardbirds' manager, wrote the words that night. The track was a smash – Springfield's only UK No 1 and still one of her most feted songs. She and Napier-Bell were so close that they discussed getting married. Both were gay, and Napier-Bell saw marriage as a way of increasing their already considerable clout in showbusiness. They dropped the idea when Wickham's then-partner threw furniture across the room at the news.

Wickham, right, with Lulu during recording of Ready Steady Go! It was on the show that she met her lifelong friend Dusty Springfield

PICTORIAL PRESS/ ALAMY

It is tempting to attribute Wickham's confidence to a comfortable upbringing in rural Inkpen, Berkshire. She was born in Newbury, the daughter of Steven Wickham, a farmer, and Stella (nee Church), a nurse. She attended a Catholic girls' school then boarding school, from which she emerged well-spoken and unflappable. After leaving school, she completed her education at the Langham Secretarial College in London and settled in a flat in Notting Hill, west London. She worked at several jobs including as a production assistant on BBC Radio's Light Programme.

In early 1963, she decided that working in TV would be more interesting, and left the BBC. A friend got her an interview with Elkan Allan, a producer at Associated-Rediffusion television, who offered her a secretarial job on a new pop show, Ready Steady Go! She accepted only when he promised she would be promoted to a creative role. By the time of the pilot (the first show aired in August 1963) she was producing it.

"Did I know anything about pop music or production? Not a thing," she said in 2020. She had been brought up on Gilbert and Sullivan and musicals, but developed an ear for the young British bands and American R&B artists who were breaking through in the UK.

Springfield, who had appeared on the RSG! pilot, introduced Wickham to black music and singers; in turn, she booked them for the show. In March 1966, she pulled off a feat in devoting an entire 50 minutes to James Brown, who was lionised by RSG!'s mod viewership; their parents, though, were so angry that half of all TV sets were reportedly switched off during the show. She also produced a special Motown episode in 1965.

> **As booker for a series of gigs promoted by Brian Epstein, she pulled in the Who and Jimi Hendrix**

After the show ended in 1966, she worked with the Beatles' manager, Brian Epstein, as the booker for some concerts he promoted at the Savill theatre in London. In the series' short existence, she pulled in acts such as the Who and Jimi Hendrix.

In 1970, she accepted an offer to manage the New York office of the Who's label, Track Records. She relocated there (a move that became permanent), and with a friend, Nancy Lewis, ran Track's affairs from a table at the nearby Russian Tea Room. Though they had an office, they were in the restaurant so often that the staff gave them a phone to use.

Lewis was publicist for the Philadelphia girl group Patti LaBelle and the Bluebelles, who had signed to Track. Wickham was dismayed that they were still presenting as a matching-gowns-and-shoes soft-R&B group. She began managing them and took them to the UK, where she turned them into silver-costumed funk queens, and urged them to sing about black issues. Renamed Labelle, the trio reached No 1 with the 1974 disco smash Lady Marmalade, co-produced by Wickham. She was in a relationship with Labelle's Nona Hendryx from 1970, and they lived together in Manhattan's Upper West Side.

Also in the early 1970s she began covering Motown and R&B for Melody Maker. Her style was knowledgable and respectful; when she had to pan a below-par concert or album, her tone was sorrowful rather than scathing.

Wickham was Springfield's manager for the last 13 years of her life. It was a challenge, she said later. Springfield struggled with bipolar disorder and depression, and Wickham had to force her to accept the Pet Shop Boys' invitation to duet on the 1987 song that would return her to the public eye, What Have I Done to Deserve This? After Springfield's death in 1999, Wickham and the journalist Penny Valentine wrote the authorised Springfield biography, Dancing With Demons.

Her time managing Morrissey came to a swift end in 1997 after he was unhappy with the chart placing of his album Maladjusted. From 1999 until the 2010s, she worked with Almond. In 1999 she received the British music industry's Woman of the Year lifetime achievement award, and she was made OBE for services to music in 2013.

She is survived by Nona, whom she married in 2011.

Caroline Sullivan

Vicki Heather Wickham, manager and producer, born 23 March 1939; died 1 August 2026

obituaries@theguardian.com

Ian McDonald

Writer whose 1969 novel The Humming-Bird Tree is a classic of Caribbean literature

Ian McDonald, who has died aged 93, wrote only one novel, but it is considered a classic of Caribbean literature. The Humming-Bird Tree (1969), set in Trinidad in the late 1940s, tells the story of Alan, a young white boy, as he falls into friendship with his family's yard-boy, Kaiser, who is of Indian extraction, and in love with Kaiser's younger sister, Jaillin, who is also employed by his wealthy parents.

While Alan and Jaillin come to terms with their confusing mutual attraction and the disapproval of his family, wider turmoil is at play in Trinidad, where the masses are beginning to throw off the yoke of British rule. Alan makes unapproved visits to her village, which he finds vibrant compared to the stiffness of home. When they are found on an innocent moonlit tryst, their relationship is brought to a forceful end.

It is a gently heartbreaking tale about racial boundaries, and a haunting evocation of postwar Trinidad, emerging into a new era with the prospect of independence on the horizon. The book's sensitive descriptions of time and place also point to the fact that McDonald was more a poet than an author, featured in many anthologies and with eight collections to his name.

In both prose and poetry, he celebrated the sensuous joy of Caribbean life in all its complexity, acknowledging the wonder of its natural world and colourful human relations without skirting over the darker, more brutal side of both.

Above all, he never failed to show compassion for those he observed, revealing what the Jamaican poet Ann-Margaret Lim called his "caring heart" – something he shared with his Caribbean peers such as Eddie Baugh and Derek Walcott. Baugh described his poetry as "irradiated by his celebration of life".

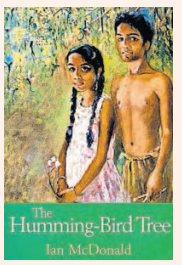
The eldest of six children, McDonald was born in St Augustine in Trinidad, where his father, John, worked as an agricultural director for a local export business and his mother, Thelma (nee Seheult), was a housewife. At Queen's Royal college in Port of Spain he shone academically and was an outstanding tennis player. Travelling in 1951 to the UK to study history at Cambridge University, he competed for several years running at the Wimbledon singles championships, captained the university tennis team and played for West Indies in their first ever Davis Cup match in 1953.

After leaving Cambridge in 1955, he returned to the Caribbean to take up an administrative post in British Guiana (now Guyana) with the Booker group, owner of huge sugar estates.

Although he continued his tennis – his last appearance at Wimbledon was in 1959, and he played for the West Indies Davis Cup team into the 1960s – he began to shift focus towards work and immersed himself in Guyana's culture. He eventually came to consider himself "Trinidadian by birth, Guyanese by adoption".

A parallel writing career began with the publication in 1955 of a first poem, Jaffo the Calypsonian, followed by others, such as The Stick-Fighters, The Cane-Cutter and The Seine-Pullers, that celebrated the artful strength of ordinary folk and appeared in Caribbean literary magazines such as Bim, Poui and Kyk-Over-Al.

There were also short stories and a one-act play, The Tramping Man, that addressed the struggles of postcolonial life and was first performed by the Theatre Guild of Guyana in 1969. In the same year, The Humming-Bird Tree won the Royal Society of Literature's Ondaatje prize (then known as the Winifred Holtby memorial prize) and became a set text in schools across the Caribbean.



Below, McDonald at the 2013 Bocas Lit festival in Trinidad. He had also been a talented tennis player and competed at Wimbledon
BOCAS LIT FEST

The novel's success created greater interest in McDonald's poetry, and his first collection appeared in Guyana. In 1975, Faber & Faber included 11 of his poems in the third edition of its Poetry Introduction series, and collections of his work followed, including Essequibo (poems about wayfarers he met in the hinterland of the Essequibo river) in 1992 and Jaffo the Calypsonian in 1994.

The Humming-Bird Tree was made into a captivating film in 1992, featuring Tom Beasley as Alan and Desha Penco as Jaillin, and broadcast as part of the BBC Screen One series.

There were more poetry collections – including Mercy Ward (1998, about his visits to dying patients in a Guyanese hospital), Between Silence and Silence (2003) and The Comfort of All Things (2012). McDonald also edited or co-edited publications including the Heinemann Book of Caribbean Poetry in English (1992) and two anthologies of West Indian writing, They Came in Ships (1998) and This Bowling Was Superfine (2009). In 2014 a selection of his prose from a weekly newspaper column in the Stabroek News was published as A Love of Poetry, followed five years later by essays on sport, An Abounding Joy.

McDonald's career in the sugar industry survived Guyana's many social and political upheavals: when Bookers was taken over by GuySuCo under a nationalisation programme in 1976, he continued as an administrative director, rising to be director of marketing and administration. He left to become chief executive of the Sugar Association of the Caribbean from 1999 until retirement in 2007. Afterwards he was a member of a panel set up by the West Indies Cricket Board to make recommendations on the governance of regional cricket. An honorary doctorate of letters came from the University of the West Indies in 1997.

New and Collected Poems (2018) included verse written in his 80s. These newer poems continued to explore his interest in the ephemeral nature of life, though perhaps with greater urgency than before. In the opening poem to Mercy Ward, he had reflected that death comes "sudden/quick as light/skin shine/then bone white".

McDonald is survived by his second wife, Mary (nee Callender), whom he married in 1983, their two children, Jamie and Darren, and a son, Keith, from his first marriage to Myrna Foster, which ended in divorce.

Peter Mason

Ian Archie McDonald, poet and author, born 18 April 1933; died 24 July 2026

> **The book is a haunting evocation of postwar Trinidad and points to the fact he was more a poet than an author**

Birthdays

Today's birthdays: Yvie Burnett, mezzo-soprano and vocal coach, 58; **Denis Canavan**, former Labour and Independent MP and chair, Yes Scotland, 84; **Keith Carradine**, actor, 77; **Alex Chalk KC**, former Conservative MP and justice secretary, 50; **Sarah Dunant**, writer, journalist and broadcaster, 76; **Chris Eubank**, boxer, 60; **David 'the Edge' Evans**, guitarist and songwriter, 65; **Roger Federer**, tennis player, 45; **Angus Fraser**, cricketer and cricket administrator, 61; **Helen Hayes**, Labour MP, 52; **Dustin Hoffman**, actor, 89; **The Right Rev Nick Holtam**, former bishop of Salisbury, 72; **Nigel Mansell**, racing driver, 73; **Hannah Miley,** swimmer, 37; **Sarah Nancollas,** former chief executive, World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts, 65; **Prof Sir Roger Penrose**, mathematician, 95; **Svetlana Savitskaya**, cosmonaut, 78; **Connie Stevens**, actor and singer, 88; **Kathryn Stone**, former parliamentary commissioner for standards, 63; **Simon Weston**, Falklands war veteran and charity fundraiser, 65, **Marianne Young**, British high commissioner to Tanzania, 55.

Tomorrow's birthdays: Gillian Anderson, actor, 58; **Kurtis Blow**, rapper and music producer, 67; **Melanie Griffith**, actor, 69; **Ralph Hasenhüttl**, football manager, 59; **Roy Hodgson**, football manager, 79; **Melanie Hopkins**, diplomat, 53; **Anna Kendrick**, actor, 41; **Sir John Key**, former New Zealand prime minister, 65; **Tim Knox**, director, Royal Collection, 64; **Satish Kumar**, activist and writer, 90; **Rod Laver**, tennis player, 88; **Kevin McKidd**, actor, 53; **Lisa Nandy**, Labour MP and culture secretary, 47; **James Naughtie**, broadcaster, 75; **Ashley Page**, ballet dancer and choreographer, 70; **Arlo Parks**, singer and songwriter, 26; **Romano Prodi**, former president of the European Commission and Italian prime minister, 87; **Yinka Shonibare**, visual artist, 64; **Posy Simmonds**, cartoonist and writer, 81; **John Simpson**, broadcaster and BBC world affairs editor, 82; **Audrey Tautou**, actor, 50; **Prof Jean Tirole**, economist, 73.

Announcements

Deaths

ARKHURST, Reginald Leon. Died on 17 July 2026 aged 68 years. Funeral service to be held at St Mary's Church, Honey Hill, Bury St Edmunds IP33 1RT on Friday 14 August 2pm, followed by a private burial. All enquiries to Co-op Funeralcare, Bury St Edmunds 01284 753424.

For Announcements, Acknowledgments, Adoptions, Anniversaries, Birthdays, Births, Deaths, Engagements, Memorial Services and In Memoriam, email us at announcements@theguardian.com including your name, address and telephone number or phone 0203 353 2114.

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Other lives

Chris Beney

Aviation and computer engineer who dedicated his spare time to increasing access to public paths

My campaigning colleague Chris Beney, who has died aged 93, believed that paths should be wide and accessible. An aviation and computer engineer by profession, he spent much of his life championing accessible paths in Hertfordshire and beyond.

Chris was a trustee of the Open Spaces Society, of which I am general secretary, for 30 years from 1996, and its chair from 2018 to 2020. Representing the society, he was a member of the British Standards Institution's panel on structures on public paths from 1999 to 2020 (and its chair from 2005), guiding it through three revisions of the standard, and winning agreement for the least restrictive option (gap, gate and stile, in that order).

With Natural England, the government's access adviser, in 2018 he helped to establish the Centre for Outdoor Accessibility Training at Aston Rowant, Oxfordshire, for testing accessible gates and mobility equipment.

Born in London, the son of Dorothea (nee Pridden), a pharmacist, and Charles Beney, an ear, nose and throat surgeon, Chris enjoyed a rural boyhood with his elder brother, Peter, in Kent, Surrey and Somerset. His first memory of injustice was when the Crystal Palace burned down in 1936, shortly before his planned visit.

After a student apprenticeship with General Electric Company, he went to Jesus College, Cambridge, where he met Hazel Goodman, an art student; they were married in 1957, a year after his graduation.

With an MA in electrical engineering, Chris was offered special government work at GEC Stanmore in lieu of national service. There, he worked on air-to-air missile computers. At Boscombe Down, in Wiltshire, he helped to build an airborne digital navigation system in the De Havilland Comet airliner, later used on Concorde, and was project manager for the Concorde flight-test-replay system. He also led a small team in flight trials of Meteor and Canberra aeroplanes, once landing in a snowstorm with the pilot having lost control: "The past does flash before you," Chris said.

In 1977 he set up Yeneb (Beney backwards) Pattinson Ltd to build and repair computers. He retired at 55. In 1986 he established the Pittecroft Trust to support projects close to his heart, such as an unsegregated school in Northern Ireland, as well as many access initiatives.

By then he lived in Bushey, Hertfordshire, where he campaigned against noisy nuisance at Elstree Aerodrome, founding the Association for the Containment of Elstree Aerodrome.

His first involvement in public paths came in the late 1980s, when spectators were challenged for watching the Elstree airshow from a public footpath. He researched the law and discovered that the spectators had done no wrong. This led him to establish the Bushey and District Footpaths Association in 1991.

Chris was generous to all who wanted to learn about paths, and a stickler for grammar, with a lovely sense of humour. His legacy includes the many paths in Hertfordshire that are open, welcoming and free from clutter.

Chris is survived by Hazel, their three children, Joanna, Charles and Grace, and four grandchildren. A fifth grandchild predeceased him.

Kate Ashbrook

Chris Beney installing a kissing gate in Bushey, Hertfordshire, 2005 COLIN KNIGHT

> **His legacy includes the many paths in Hertfordshire that are open, welcoming and free from clutter**

Kenneth Ashcroft

Financial manager and director at a number of Britain's most prominent companies

My father, Kenneth Ashcroft, who has died aged 91, was a financial manager and director at a number of Britain's best-known companies during the 1970s, 80s and 90s, including Ford, Comet, Next, Dixons and Amstrad.

He was born in Preston, Lancashire, to Winifred (nee Walker) and James, an electrician. The Ashcrofts shared a three-bedroom terrace house with another family, and for some of his early life Ken slept in the bath. As a youngster he taught himself to build radios and speakers, scouring Preston for electrical parts left behind by departing American forces after the second world war, and his interest in radio hamming lasted for the rest of his life.

On leaving Preston grammar school, he worked at a local accountancy firm while studying for chartered accountancy exams in the evenings. After qualifying, he worked as an accountant at the Atomic Energy Authority (1958-60) at Windscale, in Cumbria, and then at Mullards, a firm of accountants in Blackburn (1960-62).

In 1961, aged only 26, he moved to Ford Europe in east London as a senior finance analyst. He became financial manager of Ford Europe's sales operations at 29, featuring as one of the company's rising stars in an advert in the Sunday Times.

In 1968 he was lured back north to become finance director at the sanitary ware group Ideal Standard in Hull, and later to the Comet chain of electrical stores (1973-75), helping to save it from bankruptcy. A move followed to the Leeds-based men's outfitters Hepworth's, where he was finance director from 1975 to 1983. There he helped to oversee Hepworth's establishment of the subsidiary company Next, which initially focused on women's workwear and later became a highly successful high-street chain.

Ken became Hepworth's deputy chairman in 1982, but after some boardroom manoeuvres he left, exchanging his company Jaguar for a bicycle for a time, before being appointed as finance director at Dixons in London in 1984.

After two years there he moved to work for Alan Sugar as Amstrad's finance director, with Sugar giving orders from a raised central desk. After that he worked for Sugar at Betacom and in retirement was a non-executive director for the lighthouse authority Trinity House.

A gifted pianist and organist, Ken also helped to run the St Albans international organ festival in Hertfordshire and to restore the cinema organ in Hull. He met Patricia Hothersall while they were studying at Preston library. They married in 1957, and she, too, went on to work at the Atomic Energy Authority, as a scientist.

She survives him, along with their two daughters, Jayne and me, and four grandchildren.

Jill Campion

Rose Sharp

Arts administrator committed to promoting work outside the traditional boundaries of theatre

My friend Rose Sharp, who has died aged 74, was an extraordinary arts administrator. She engaged with work she believed in, supporting artists and cultural institutions in challenging sexism and promoting LGBT visibility in the arts.

Rose was born in Shrivenham, Oxfordshire, to Dora (nee Benford) and William Sharp. She and her older siblings, Valerie and David, attended schools in Singapore, Berlin and Northern Ireland, relocating as their father (a major in the Royal Engineers) was assigned to overseas postings.

She began developing her prodigious talents in planning, finance and organisation as a roadie for the anarchist psychedelic band the Pink Fairies in the early 1970s, followed by a move to London and employment at Dingwalls, the music venue in Camden.

Rose began working on the administrative side of the arts in the mid-1970s at the Bloomsbury theatre, and for the groundbreaking Gay Sweatshop theatre company. Between the early 80s and 2009, she held administrative positions at the Drill Hall arts centre (now Rada Studios), with the Monstrous Regiment company and at the International Workshop Festival, an initiative of the Arts Council of Great Britain, which later became Arts Council England (Ace).

She worked for the Deal Theatre Project in Kent from 1987 to 1989. Rose played an integral role in organising countless productions funded by the Greater London council. She also acted as an independent agent for me, and for the theatre and performance artists Siren Theatre and Split Britches.

Her attention to detail, and her unflagging belief that public-funding organisations (such as Ace) have an obligation to support work that falls outside the traditional boundaries of theatre, propelled her efforts. The more likely it seemed that funding for a particular project would be out of reach, the more determined she was to procure it. When Rose uttered the phrase "done and dusted", one knew that there was nothing else humanly possible left to be attended to.

From 2006 until the early 2020s, Rose worked within the School of the Arts at Queen Mary University of London. She generously shared her arts admin skills by mentoring students in supporting the work of artists in residence. At the end of her career, she was administrator for the multidisciplinary artist Bobby Baker. Rose worked behind the scenes to facilitate the work of many other artists and producers over the course of more than 45 years.

Rose was a staunch lesbian feminist, a lighthearted rapscallion on a lifetime quest for the perfect lemon drizzle cake. She formed deep and lasting friendships throughout her life, and was truly one of a kind.

She is survived by her sister, Valerie, and her nieces, Melanie and Joanne.

Janice Perry

Sudoku

The normal rules of s udoku apply: fill each row, column and 3x3 box with all the numbers from 1 to 9.

Easy

2		7				6		5
		8	5		9	2		
	5			7			9	
	7	1	9		8	4	3	
				3				
	4	5	2		7	1	8	
	1			2			5	
		6	4		5	9		
5		2				3		4

Medium

		6		9	8	4		
						5	3	
				5			9	6
6	8	1						4
	2		8			1		5
			1	6				
7					6			2
4				8	2			
2	6	9			3			

Expert

1	3			2			5	
8		5			1			
	6				3			1
		3		8	5	6		
6								9
		2	7	9		5		
5			2				9	
			8			1		2
	9			6			4	5

Futoshiki

Easy

Fill in the grid so that every row and column contains the numbers 1-5. The "greater than" or "less than" signs indicate where a number is larger or smaller than its neighbour.

□	>	□		□		2	>	□
						∧		
□		□	>	□		□	>	□
2	>	□		3		□	<	□
∧								
□		□		□		□	<	□
							∧	
□	>	□		□		□	<	□

Kids Word search

Find all the listed Fairground Attractions in the grid, reading in straight lines, up, down or diagonally, either backwards or forwards.

ARCADE, BIG WHEEL, CAROUSEL, DODGEMS, FOOD, HOOP-LA, LIGHTS, MUSIC, PRIZE, SLIDE, STALL, SWING, TRAIN, WALTZER

S	M	E	G	D	O	D	N	B
C	A	R	O	U	S	E	L	B
E	H	F	N	N	S	R	I	P
D	O	O	F	T	E	G	S	R
A	O	N	A	Z	W	N	T	I
C	P	L	T	H	I	I	H	Z
R	L	L	E	A	T	W	G	E
A	A	E	R	M	U	S	I	C
W	L	T	U	E	D	I	L	S

Kids Countdown

Can you work out the answers to the sums below?

Easy	Medium	Hard
9	**37**	**71**
+ 13	- 29	+ 137
Half of it	× 13	*50% of it*
+ 22	*Half of it*	- 39
÷ 3	+ 25	÷ 13
+ 19	÷ 11	× 9
÷ 6	*Treble it*	+ 185
× 7	*- 17*	÷ 10
- 10	× 10	+ 177
÷ 5	- 26	*3/8 of it*
Answer	Answer	Answer

Solutions

Kids Countdown

Easy: 5
Medium: 14
Hard: 75

Sudoku *Easy*

2	9	7	3	8	1	6	4	5
1	6	8	5	4	9	2	7	3
4	5	3	6	7	2	8	9	1
3	4	5	2	6	7	1	8	9
8	2	9	1	3	4	5	6	7
6	7	1	9	5	8	4	3	2
9	1	4	8	2	6	7	5	3
7	3	6	4	9	5	8	2	6
5	8	2	7	1	3	9	6	4

Sudoku *Medium*

8	4	7	3	5	1	9	6	2
2	6	9	4	8	7	3	5	1
1	3	5	6	2	9	4	7	8
5	8	3	2	6	4	9	1	7
9	2	4	7	1	5	6	8	3
7	1	6	9	3	8	2	4	5
6	9	8	1	7	2	5	3	4
4	5	2	8	9	3	7	2	6
3	7	1	5	4	6	8	9	9

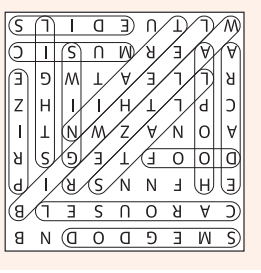
Sudoku *Expert*

2	9	1	3	6	7	4	8	5
3	4	6	8	5	9	1	7	2
5	8	7	2	1	4	3	9	6
4	1	2	7	9	6	5	3	8
6	5	8	4	3	2	7	1	9
9	7	3	1	8	5	6	2	4
8	6	9	5	4	3	2	8	1
7	2	5	9	7	1	4	6	3
1	3	4	6	2	8	9	5	7

Futoshiki

4	>	3		1		2	<	5
∨								
2	>	1		4		5		3
							∨	
5	>	4		3		1	<	2
3	<	5		2	<	4		1
∨								
1	<	2		5		3	<	4

Kids Word search



Yesterday's solutions

Killer sudoku
Easy

5	8	1	9	7	4	3	2	6
6	3	4	8	2	1	9	7	5
7	2	9	3	5	6	1	8	4
8	7	6	2	9	5	4	3	1
1	5	2	7	4	3	6	9	8
4	9	3	6	1	8	2	5	7
2	1	5	4	3	7	8	6	9
9	4	8	5	6	2	7	1	3
3	6	7	1	8	9	5	4	2

Medium

1	8	2	7	3	6	5	4	9
6	5	7	4	9	2	1	3	8
9	3	4	8	5	1	6	7	2
5	7	9	1	2	4	8	6	3
8	6	3	9	7	5	4	2	1
2	4	1	3	6	8	7	9	5
4	2	6	5	8	9	3	1	7
3	9	5	6	1	7	2	8	4
7	1	8	2	4	3	9	5	6

Codeword

■	B	■	S	■	T	■	G	■	E	■	D	■		
B	A	Z	A	A	R	■	L	U	X	U	R	Y		
■	R	■	R	■	Y	■	A	■	P	■	E	■		
T	R	A	I	P	S	E	D	■	E	X	A	M		
■	A	■	■	■	T	■	I	■	D	■	M	■		
O	C	C	U	R	■	M	A	T	I	N	E	E		
■	K	■	B	■	C	■	T	■	T	■	D	■		
■	■	V	I	T	R	I	O	L	I	C	■	■		
■	S	■	Q	■	O	R	■	O	■	H	■	■		
R	O	G	U	I	S	H	■	U	N	I	O	N		
■	U	■	I	■	S	E	■	■	■	■	V	■		
P	L	O	T	■	O	B	J	E	C	T	E	D		
■	F	■	O	■	V	■	E	■	U	■	R	■		
F	U	T	U	R	E	■	C	O	B	W	E	B		
■	L	■	S	■	R	■	T	■	E	■	D	■		

Cryptic crossword
Solution No. 30,079

B	E	N	E	F	I	T	■	C	H	E	E	T	A	H
Y	■	U	■	U	■	I	■	O	■	O	■	S	■	E
L	A	D	E	N	■	T	A	R	A	N	T	U	L	A
A	■	I	■	D	■	H	■	P	■	S	■	N	■	D
W	A	T	E	R	M	E	L	O	N	■	■	A	G	A
S	■	Y	■	A	■	■	■	R	■	D	■	M	■	C
■	■	■	B	I	L	L	I	E	E	I	L	I	S	H
S	N	■	S	■	A	■	A	■	S	■	S	■	E	■
T	R	A	C	E	Y	U	L	L	M	A	N	■	■	■
R	■	R	■	R	■	G	■	■	■	P	■	C	■	H
A	R	C	■	■	T	H	I	N	K	P	I	E	C	E
P	■	O	■	M	■	L	■	A	■	O	■	L	■	A
P	U	T	R	E	F	I	E	D	■	I	■	S	L	E
T	■	I	■	G	■	N	■	I	■	N	■	A	■	E
D	E	C	L	A	R	E	■	R	E	T	I	R	E	D

Looking for more?
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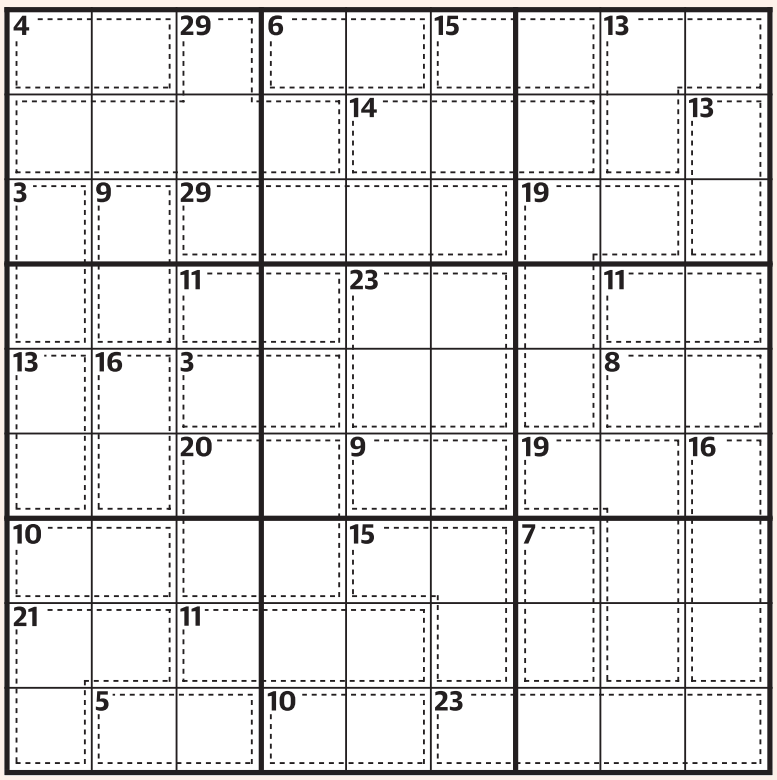
Killer sudoku

Hard No 1034

The normal rules of sudoku apply: fill each row, column and 3x3 box with all the numbers from 1 to 9. In addition, the digits in each inner shape (marked by dots) must add up to the number in the top corner of that box. No digit can be repeated within an inner shape.

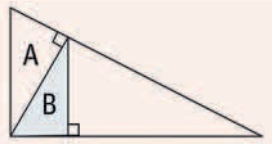


Chris Maslanka's puzzles

Pyrgic puzzles

1 A tourist cashed a cheque for A dollars and B cents but the bank cashier handed over B dollars and A cents by mistake. The tourist spent 68 cents on a postcard and then found he had twice as much left as the original cheque had been for. How much was that?

2 Abe sneaked into Ma Rainey's pantry and spotted her "Pythagoras Pie" – resting. She always made this signature pie in the



form of a right-angled triangle. He cut off a triangular piece similar in shape to the whole and went off with it. Later Babe sneaked in and cut off another piece similar to the whole (shown by the shaded portion pictured) and left. What fraction did Abe take? What fraction of the original did Babe take? What fraction of the original was left? (Assume the sides of the original pie were a, b and c where a < b < c.) What if (a, b, c) = (3, 4, 5)?

3 Down at the *Last Chance* saloon, Bart Ender shuffles a full deck of 52 cards and is about to deal them one at a time face up on the bar. Before he starts he invites Gus to bet on what the position of the second red ace will be. What is Gus's best bet? What are Gus's odds then of being right?

4 An easy one: ASP x 3 = SSS. (Different letters represent different digits!)

email: therealmaslanka@yahoo.com

Wordplay

Wordpool
In each case find the correct definition:

DEGU
a) argot for *disgust*
b) small South American rodent
c) spout of a gargoyle
d) swagger

NACKET
a) small snack
b) worn out
c) football rattle
d) the trick of a thing

ACICULAR
a) aperiodic at all scales
b) sewing monitor
c) needle-shaped
d) old term for the *Green's function*

E pluribus unum
Rearrange the letters of NUCLEAR FEUD to make a single word.

Dropouts
Identify the word(s) in which each asterisk marks a missing letter: H*A*I*R

Same Difference
Identify the words that differ only in their first letter:
****** (interruption to supply...)
R (... and public reaction to it?)

Cryptic
She's from Tijuana – we hear she dines alone (7)

Missing Links
Find a word that follows the first word in the clue and precedes the second, in each case making a fresh word or phrase. Eg the answer to *fish mix* could be *cake* (fish*cake* & *cake* mix) and to *bat man* it could be *he* (bat*he* & *he*-man)...
a) hot top b) log roll
c) riding yield d) picture work
e) sour nut f) con thing

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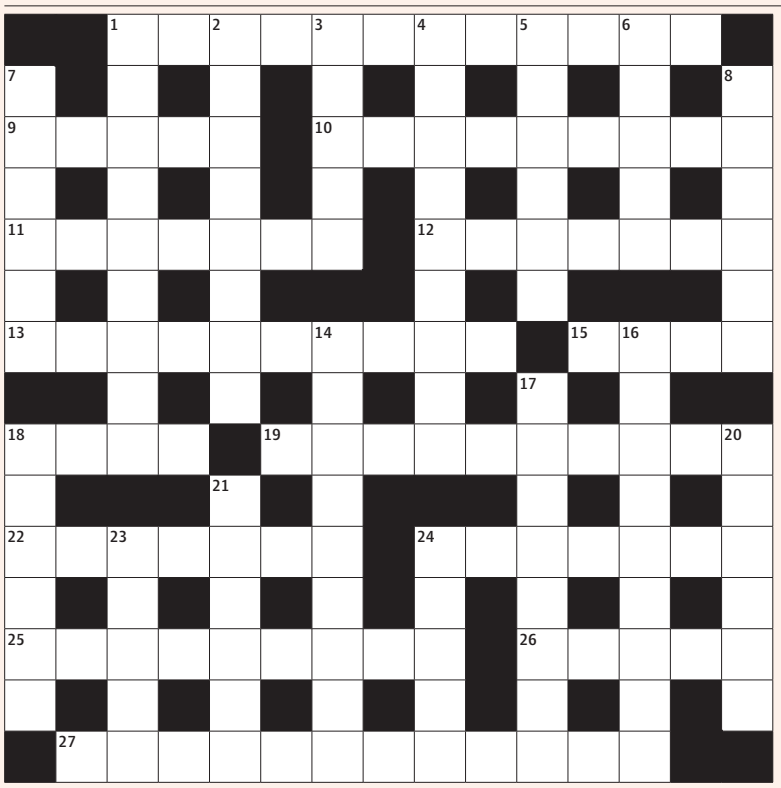
Guardian cryptic crossword No 30,080 set by Vlad



Across
1 Left in van (7,5)
9 With Adams' header, win a second time (5)
10 Wow! Old political leader pointlessly filmed Harry entering (3.6)
11 Trivial Pursuit's first two getting egghead upset (7)
12 Expert fisherman, one might say, takes you round country (7)
13 Wives receiving 'support'? No way, it's a misleading term (6,4)
15 President departs, lying (4)
18 Try to get religious believer talking (4)
19 Run up to end something special (8,2)
22 Music and Liverpool? It's a good relationship (7)
24 'Dead soldiers ultimately losers' – Mr President regularly awful (7)
25 Wasted chance to go higher when retired? (9)
26 Old people's home rejected jewellery originally (5)
27 Thieves disposed of mostly property and cash around island (5,7)

Down
1 Could be Nepal one accepted – also separately Malta? (5,4)
2 'They're on the house' – worker comes in a lot (8)
3 Decoy pocketing Charlie's money (5)
4 Element from Red Planet (4,5)
5 Arrive in drag – men bowled over (4,2)
6 Titled gent upset by journalist (5)
7 Greedily handles fruit (6)
8 Through Henry about to get free modern car (6)
14 Powder, not drug – it's right for treating medical condition (5-4)
16 Playful lambs in SE showing soft and gentle nature (9)
17 Cunning hiding effect of injury – won leading decoration in battle (8)
18 Writer's copy almost ready for wrapping (6)
20 Iceland ordeal over, having a ball (6)
21 Against describing one medic standing as blue-eyed boy (6)
23 Where to see pictures causing trouble with publicists? (5)
24 The bilingual church official (5)

The first five correct entries drawn each week win a copy of The Language Lover's Puzzle Book by Alex Bellos
Entries to: The Guardian Crossword No 30,080,
P.O. Box 17566, Birmingham, B33 3EZ, or Fax to 0121-742 1313 by Friday.
Solution and winners in The Guardian on Monday 17 August.

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The Guardian Saturday 8 August 2026

Sport

Barça bid
City reject £38m Rodri offer as talks continue

Page 5 →

Quest Ham
The tears have dried – now for second tier

Page 6 →

Flintoff steps down as Lions head coach

Page 7 →

'There is no trust'
Norway is first nation to demand Infantino quits

Exclusive
Nick Ames

The Norwegian FA will ask Gianni Infantino to resign with immediate effect after his doomed attempt to sell stakes in the World Cup to private investors.

Norway is the first federation to call directly for the Fifa president to step down after a series of controversies that came to a head with the crisis engulfing his Fifa Forward Enterprise scheme. The decision was made at a meeting of the Norwegian Football Federation board (NFF) on Thursday night. Norway has consistently taken a lead in efforts to scrutinise Fifa's governance and recent events have taken any faith in its leadership beyond the point of no return.

"We decided that there is no trust in Infantino now," the NFF president, Lise Klaveness, told the Guardian. "We have been worried consistently and there has been one more step in a worrying direction every year, every part of the year. The trust is now gone for us, there is no way back for Infantino.

"We're left in a very polarised cooperation globally and, I would say, chaos. So we will ask him to resign immediately so that the global football community can look ahead and cooperate going into the future."

The NFF is expected to formally write a letter requesting Infantino's resignation in the coming week. Norway was among a handful of countries not to back his re-election as president next March, although several European federations have withdrawn their endorsement in the past week.

"We understand that we're one country, but it's our position," Klaveness said. "It's just one step further for us. We did not vote for him in 2023 but we hoped we would support him, he was elected and the reason why we were so clear in our statements was to really give the signal that we wanted him to implement the good reforms he was part of. But he didn't, and now we will ask him to resign."

Norway will also formalise a fresh complaint 4 →

Lise Klaveness has hit out at the Fifa president

DEAN MOUHTAROPOULOS/GETTY

Close to Holmes
Georgia Hunter Bell on the European Championships and the quest to emulate Kelly's double Olympic gold

Interview Page 10 →

Jonathan Wilson
Two weeks that shook Fifa to its rotten core

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'Stand by beliefs'
Bronze wants boycott ⊕ Argentina & Mexico deepen civil war

Pages 3 & 4 →

Ewan Murray meets Ewen Murray
Talking Tiger, stiff gin … and mistaken identity

Faces to the name: the Guardian's Ewan (left) and Sky's Ewen

Page 9 →

Infantino furore has deep roots – Fifa is rotten institutionally

The ongoing saga engulfing a governing body that may be irredeemable stretches back to a decision made in 2010

Jonathan Wilson

There are decades in which nothing happens, and weeks in which decades happen, and those weeks tend to result in leaders being toppled. Not even a fortnight ago, Gianni Infantino was taking his victory lap on Instagram, attacking "those behind their pens and papers, behind their screens spreading hate and false rumours" who had dared to question elements of his World Cup, which had generated a record $15bn in revenues. But the next day came the revelation of his plan to sell the World Cup to outside investors and a backlash that has him scrabbling to save his presidency.

It has been a remarkable few days, but this is a story whose roots stretch way back, to the decision in Zurich in 2010 to award the 2022 World Cup not to the US but to Qatar, to a furious Bill Clinton hurling an ashtray across the room and demanding action, to an FBI inquiry into corruption, and to the flipping of the larger-than-life Concacaf general secretary Chuck Blazer, who had two apartments in Trump Tower, one for himself and one for his cats.

Blazer now appears the cheery, bearded, acceptable face of Fifa corruption. He drove about on a mobility scooter with his parrot on his shoulder and once high-fived Vladimir Putin after the Russian president suggested he looked like Karl Marx. But it was Blazer's evidence that led to the arrests at Zurich's Baur au Lac hotel in 2015 and the resignation of Sepp Blatter.

The overwhelming favourite to replace Blatter was the president of Uefa, Michel Platini. He, though, was unacceptable to the US, because it was his decision to switch his vote to Qatar, following – although he maintains not as a result of – a meeting at the Élysée Palace with the then French president Nicolas Sarkozy and the crown prince and prime minister of Qatar.

The discussion seems more about who might defeat Infantino than how to change Fifa

Conveniently, evidence was found of a payment he had received from Fifa in 2011 leading to his suspension. The Berne federal prosecutor, Michael Lauber, broke protocol to name Platini as something "between a witness and a suspect". It was enough: Platini stepped aside and Infantino stepped in as Uefa's candidate. Lauber subsequently became attorney general of Switzerland only to resign after secretly meeting Infantino while investigating Fifa. Platini was subsequently cleared and is suing both Fifa and Infantino.

At the time, Infantino was the secretary general of Uefa, notable largely for his comical earnestness while conducting Champions League draws. He was elected Fifa president in February 2016, defeating the Bahraini Sheikh Salman bin Ibrahim Al Khalifa, the president of the Asian Football Confederation, an avid hunter of wild boar who denied allegations of complicity in the torture of pro-democracy campaigners. Key had been a late change of mind by the Caribbean bloc: Sunil Gulati, the president of the US Soccer Federation, took credit for his persuasiveness.

With an ally elected, the US, Mexico and Canada won the right to host the 2026 World Cup. "You wanted to have it there and I wanted to have it there, and we really did it before we came to office," Donald Trump, performing his classic trick of supervillain exposition, told Infantino at a dinner in Davos in 2020. The order of events is worth reiterating: Infantino was elected in February 2016, Trump was inaugurated in January 2017, the World Cup hosting decision was taken in May 2018.

The US has been a constant in Infantino's presidency. He took power at a time when the US attorney general, Loretta Lynch, was promising to swill corruption out of Fifa but in terms of decisive action that has amounted to little more than a handful of cases involving dodgy South American broadcast rights deals. In May 2019 Fifa appointed as legal representatives the US law firm Paul Weiss. A few weeks

earlier Paul Weiss had named a new senior partner: the former US attorney general Lynch. The following year, she praised Fifa's newfound "transparency and ethical behaviour".

Few would agree with her. Infantino arrived promising reform, yet within a year he was removing two leaders of Fifa's ethics commission. The same weekend that Trump sacked James Comey as head of the FBI, in part for investigating Russian interference in US politics, Infantino fired Miguel Maduro, the chair of the governance and review committee, for blocking the re-election as a Fifa vice-president of the head of the Russian Football Union Vitaly Mutko on the grounds that as Russia's sports minister he breached guidelines on political involvement.

Infantino repeatedly bypassed the Fifa council, ducked the scrutiny of press conferences

Gianni's big misadventure Two weeks that rocked Fifa

Monday 27 July
A swipe at fake news
Infantino marks the end of the World Cup by taking to Instagram with a 15-page post calling out the media for trying to sully it. He says it was a month of "joy and happiness", and "those sitting behind their pens and papers, behind their screens, spreading hate and false rumours" about greed and his relationship with Donald Trump had let themselves down "while we at Fifa are on the frontlines, working hard". He says journalists should step back and "take a moment to reflect, meditate, pray or watch a match".

Tuesday 28 July
Advice not taken
Hours later, a report in the Times exposes Infantino's secret £3.1bn plan to sell stakes in the World Cup to private investors, potentially earning him tens of millions of pounds. The deal involves the brother of Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner. Politicians and football figures attack it, with one surprise voice being the former Fifa president Sepp Blatter. He tweets his discomfort that "the financial dimension is deeply damaging football".

Wednesday 29 July
First response
As outrage spreads, Infantino (📷) tries to cool the mood, admitting the scheme is real but saying it is also just a "proposal, an offer … part of a democratic process, a consultation". It later emerges that Fifa has given its 211 member associations a deadline of 19 September to back it or lose their £15m cut. Concacaf says it was "only made aware of this matter through media reports", while Uefa accuses Fifa officials of "using our sport to enrich themselves and their friends".

Thursday 30 July
Uefa bares teeth
After the Guardian exposes the full details of the plan drawn up by Fifa and the US bank JP Morgan – which calls Fifa "undermonetized" – Uefa holds an emergency meeting. All 55 members agree to boycott Fifa competitions if the plan goes ahead. Other football bodies join the backlash, while, in the US, a senior Democrat warns Fifa could face a congressional investigation. Jamie Raskin calls it "a smash-and-grab scam of colossal proportions".

Friday 31 July
Potus puts some distance
Hours after Fifa's own chief operating officer slates the proposal, Andy Burnham becomes the first head of a major nation to call on Infantino to resign. Donald Trump (📷), meanwhile, says he has nothing to do with it: "I never spoke to him." In response to the global coverage, Fifa condemns journalists: "Our planned consultation process was disrupted by incorrect media reports. We will proceed with this consultation … Nobody is selling football."

Saturday 1 August
On second thoughts
Fifa doesn't proceed with the consultation. Infantino instead issues a new statement, withdrawing the plan "having listened carefully to all the views". But Uefa still ups the pressure on him, saying the Fifa leadership has "lost our confidence … We must identify those responsible and hold them to account … No option should be off the table." There is one voice of support, though. Qatar's FA says it "fully supports president Infantino's efforts to continue growing and strengthening the game".

▼ *Gianni Infantino (right) with the mayor of Cali, Alejandro Eder, after arriving in Colombia yesterday for the inauguration of president Abelardo de la Espriella*
JAIME SALDARRIAGA/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

and came increasingly to rule by fiat. The plan to sell off a chunk of the World Cup is just the most egregious example. Why would he keep a plan of such revolutionary significance from his senior staff? Why would he give his members 53 days to consider such a plan, offering them a cash bonus to acquiesce? Why would he undermine his own tournament with hydration breaks and a half-time show in the final? Why override disciplinary protocols so the right players will be on the field, seemingly to highlight the tournament's commercial appeal to potential investors?

The people who were in on the deal were connected to the Trump family, specifically Joshua Kushner, the brother of the president's son-in-law. Again, questions immediately arise. Why would you sell off 21% of all future revenues for only 28% of what this World Cup made? Infantino's relationship with Trump – awarding him the inaugural Fifa Peace Prize, appearing with him at world events, giving him a Club World Cup trophy, renting an office for Fifa in Trump Tower that is seemingly barely used – had already brought criticism.

Uefa's robust and united response, the threat to boycott Fifa tournaments, was evidently not anticipated. The plan is dead, at least for now. Infantino, damaged, clings on, having rallied at least some senior Fifa staff at an emergency meeting in Rabat this week. The chief operating officer, Kevin Lamour, one of the two members of the five-man inner council who voted against the plan when informed about it the day before the World Cup final, was, notably, not there. Plans to expand the World Cup to 64 teams, rallying Infantino's base, have been accelerated.

Letters of support that had looked as if they would ensure Infantino a further term unopposed are being withdrawn. Yesterday, perhaps impressed by the promise of the 2030 World Cup final being in Casablanca, the Confederation of African Football pledged its support, joining Mexico, Argentina, Qatar, the UAE, Lebanon, Kuwait, Bhutan and Sri Lanka in backing Infantino.

Perhaps there will be an election, as scheduled, next March. Perhaps Infantino can muster a majority among Fifa's 211 members. But Uefa has vowed to "paralyse" Fifa until he is gone. The first tournament that might be boycotted is the Under-20 Women's World Cup, which begins in Poland on 5 September. Poland has made significant investment in infrastructure and is keen for the tournament to go ahead as scheduled but its football federation would be unlikely to step outside the Uefa bloc.

The politicking goes on although already the discussion seems more about who might challenge or defeat Infantino than about how to change Fifa, where clientelism has reigned since João Havelange won the 1974 presidential election. The institution itself is rotten; it may be that it is irredeemable.

It's very hard to know how genuine Infantino's attempt to reform Fifa was, but it quickly foundered. And so Fifa's attempt to move on from the crisis caused by the executive who rented an apartment for his cats in Trump Tower has wound up back in Trump Tower, with a president who rents an office there.

'We stand by our beliefs': Bronze backs Uefa's boycott

Tom Garry

Lucy Bronze has backed Uefa's stance on boycotting all Fifa competitions for the "good of the game" and to safeguard football for future generations.

On Thursday Europe's governing body doubled down on its threat – including next summer's Women's World Cup – amid the furore surrounding the Fifa president, Gianni Infantino, and his shelved plan for a privately funded tournament.

"The message that we stand by … is 'for the good of the game'. The players who play in those competitions, the European players, we stand by our beliefs and what the right thing is for our game," the 34-year-old Lionesses right-back said.

Chelsea's Bronze was speaking before today's pre-season friendly against Auckland FC at Eden Park. She added: "If that means boycotting competitions, then that has to happen. It's for the future of the game and not just for me today and tomorrow, it's for all the little girls or little boys who come after us to make sure that they're in a good place, when the game is moving forward in decades to come, not just tomorrow."

Uefa's threat of a boycott could have an impact on September's Under-20 Women's World Cup in Poland, where England are due to line up in Group B alongside Brazil, Canada and Tanzania.

▲ *The 2027 Women's World Cup is on the horizon for veteran Lucy Bronze*

Sunday 2 August
Trump won't pick up
A rebellion appears to begin among members of the Fifa council, while European countries discuss withdrawing longstanding letters of support for Infantino's re-election. Elsewhere, the New York Post claims Infantino has "repeatedly tried" to call Trump for help, but Trump isn't answering. And @SeppBlatter (📷) posts another disappointed tweet: "Money matters, but it must never become everything. #GianniInfantino"

Monday 3 August
Lawyers send letters
The coordinated withdrawal of support begins. England, Wales and Serbia join Finland and Sweden in demanding change at the top. Meanwhile, lawyers acting for Uefa order Infantino and his staff to preserve all documents related to the collapsed scheme, saying Uefa is "considering legal action, arbitration, and/or regulatory complaints". The Concacaf president, Victor Montagliani, emerges as a leading contender to challenge for the job.

Tuesday 4 August
Mattias turns
More key allies distance themselves from the Fifa president, including his No 2, Mattias Grafström, who calls the plan a "sad and reproachable series of events" in a leaked email to staff. Greece pulls support from Infantino, while Jordan's Prince Ali bin al-Hussein accuses Infantino's administration of "blackmail", alleging that Fifa threatened to withhold financial assistance from his federation if it refused to back the president's bid for re-election.

Wednesday 5 August
Wagons circle
Infantino reacts, calling a Fifa staff crisis meeting in Morocco. Fifa then issues a statement saying staff gave him their unanimous backing while also putting his critics on notice: "It was agreed that Fifa will no longer tolerate any attacks on its integrity." The former Portugal star Luís Figo (📷), meanwhile, writes in the Daily Mail: "Infantino has lied, deceived and tried to feather his own nest … It is too late to save his dignity but it is not too late to save football. He should go. Now."

Thursday 6 August
Having none of it
Responding to the Fifa statement about its staff meeting, Uefa doubles down on its boycott threat. It adds: "Yesterday's announcement that some people employed by the Fifa president (and whose careers depend on his favour) agree with him changes nothing." The global players' union, Fifpro, meanwhile, says that while Infantino's scheme is gone, "the abuse of power that produced it is not … Reforms, not a cover-up, are urgently needed."

Friday 7 August
Battle lines drawn
Allies surface as Mexico and Argentina follow Africa's governing body in rallying round – but others join the backlash. Norway's FA calls for him to go and makes a new ethics complaint against Infantino on multiple fronts, including over his alleged breaches of Fifa's rules on political neutrality. Infantino, meanwhile, takes a mini-break, arriving in Colombia for the inauguration of the hard-right president Abelardo de la Espriella (📷), a key Trump ally. **David Hills**

▼ *Mexico co-hosted the World Cup with the US and Canada this summer*
IAN ROBLES/EYEPIX GROUP/SHUTTERSTOCK

Mexico and Argentina back Infantino to deepen civil war

Matt Hughes

Mexico's football federation has broken ranks with the rest of Concacaf by publicly backing the beleaguered Gianni Infantino in a move that has deepened world football's civil war.

Concacaf has called for a thorough review of Fifa's governance in the light of the World Cup sell-off debacle, and is backing Uefa's demands for meaningful change, although has yet to follow its European counterparts by threatening to boycott tournaments if they do not achieve their objectives.

In a statement issued on Thursday night, the FMF went some way towards explaining Concacaf's reticence, as its second-biggest member after the US was unequivocal in its support for the Fifa president. In a Fifa statement released under Infantino's name on Wednesday, the world governing body had called for its institutional practices to be respected, a coded way of condemning any leadership challenge before next March's scheduled presidential election, which the FMF endorsed.

"The Mexican Football Federation is convinced that football is its fundamental value and that its best defence lies in institutional integrity and respect for the governance and processes that safeguard it," the FMF said. "Therefore, the FMF will not recognise or approve any process convened outside of this institutional framework, and it embraces the call issued by president Infantino on 5 August 2026 to collectively continue developing football for the benefit of its 211 member associations.

"The FMF supports president Infantino's leadership in continuing to promote the development of football through institutional strengthening."

The Argentina Football Association (AFA) followed Mexico's lead by backing Infantino in a gushing tribute and expressing support for his leadership over the past decade. Unlike Concacaf, South America's Conmebol appears united behind Infantino, while in an intriguing subplot there is growing speculation that Mexico would like to switch confederations to join the latter.

"In relation to the recent events that are public knowledge, we must recognise the decision of the administration to withdraw a project that generated, within the football family and from its inception, many more uncertainties than certainties," the AFA statement read.

"That is why it is worth highlighting the acceptance of the errors made in this process and the apology expressed in the heartfelt message displayed to the 211 member associations of Fifa. Prioritising governance standards is a fundamental pillar for strengthening good relations between Fifa, its member associations and the confederations.

"You are leading a management that led to a profound transformation of Fifa, which opened the doors of the organisation to all member associations and confederations, so that with a frank and direct dialogue, we can, together, continue to promote football at all levels and disciplines.

"This transformation was based on a model of transparent governance, respect for statutory structures and the monitoring of democratic procedures, essential principles for the football family to be united, firm and working to continue generating improvements in sports and institutions, which have an impact on a better quality of life for millions of human beings who practise our beloved sport.

"Accordingly, with the upcoming Fifa congress approaching, the association that we proudly preside over firmly believes and reaffirms that the way forward is to continue to work under your leadership, so that we can continue to develop better and even more inclusive football."

'Uefa knows now is crunch time', insists Klaveness

Continued *from front page*

to Fifa's ethics committee on three fronts, taking in the FFE scandal, the award of Fifa's peace prize to Donald Trump and the Folarin Balogun affair at the World Cup. It will attempt to bring a number of major European federations on board for its submission in an effort to further increase the pressure on Infantino.

"We want the ethics committee to show their work transparently because this is a very big part of the issue," Klaveness said. "There are all kinds of control mechanisms in place but they are not really holding the council and president accountable."

In June, the NFF wrote to the ethics committee supporting a complaint by the advocacy group FairSquare, which centred on alleged breaches of political neutrality by Infantino. It will now make a new submission that asks for the three situations to be considered individually. "We will join them in one letter but they are very different cases and we want the ethical committee to treat them separately," Klaveness said.

The NFF is understood to have particular concerns that the timing of Infantino's FFE offer, which promised federations significant financial gains if accepted, may constitute an abuse of position at this proximity to a presidential election.

As with its call for Infantino to step down, Norway is the first federation to adopt a public stance regarding the peace prize or the Balogun case. Fifa's decision to suspend the USA striker's red card during the World Cup, meaning he was free to face Belgium in the last 16, came after Trump had called Infantino to discuss the ban.

Uefa's federations have stood together in backing a potential boycott of Fifa competitions, a stance Uefa reasserted on Thursday despite Infantino's shelving of FFE. Klaveness said the move is not merely symbolic and is intended to bring swift results.

> ***'Global football cooperation is at stake'***
>
> **Lise Klaveness**
> *NFF president*

"There's no point in Uefa standing in a war position for half a year," she said. "That would not be good at all. Now it's crucial that we do it because global football cooperation is at stake. It's very good to see we have strong leadership in Uefa that knows now is crunch time for this case. We cannot sell out this core of football."

The first competition in line for a boycott would be the Under-20 Women's World Cup, which is due to start in Poland on 5 September, but Klaveness expects the continued turmoil to have been resolved by then.

"I hope and think it will not come to that," she said. "A lot of water will go under the bridge before that. But this is why we ask Infantino to resign. It's so unstable now that it's a matter of time. He cannot recover this and we cannot put the sport on the spot. The biggest priority is to be together with Uefa and have this strong position."

Klaveness has been vocal on human rights issues and governance standards within Fifa, criticising the Qatar World Cup and questioning the process that awarded Saudi Arabia the 2034 edition of the tournament.

Spurs talk to Atlético about Romero after rejecting rivals

Ed Aarons

Tottenham are in talks with Atlético Madrid over the sale of Cristian Romero after categorically rejecting Arsenal's approach for the Argentina defender, and are expected to agree a new five-year deal with Micky van de Ven.

Romero has made no secret of his desire to leave Spurs despite signing a new four-year contract at the start of last season and had looked set to join Inter for a fee of around £35m. But Atlético are long-term suitors of the 28-year-old and are thought to be his preferred destination, with Diego Simeone's side understood to be prepared to match Inter's bid.

Reports in Spain suggested personal terms have been agreed with Romero, although his move may have to wait for Atlético to free up space in their squad before they can complete the transfer. Nahuel Molina, Romero's Argentina teammate, is expected to join Roma while Aston Villa are hoping to sign Matteo Ruggeri.

Arsenal had also made their interest known as they search for a replacement for William Saliba, with the Frenchman out for an extended period due to a back issue. However, Tottenham – who have signed defenders Jan Paul van Hecke and Marcos Senesi this summer – insisted that they did not want to sell to another Premier League club, least of all their north London rivals. Arsenal are also interested in Villa's Ezri Konsa.

It is understood that Van de Ven had been considering his future in north London at the start of the summer after Tottenham narrowly avoided relegation last season. But the impact of the new manager, Roberto De Zerbi, has persuaded the Netherlands international to commit his future to the club after talks with his representatives.

Tottenham have already spent more than £200m on six new players this summer and are still in the market for a new attacker. Last week, De Zerbi said that they had "completed 60% of our project in the transfer market".

▲ *Reports claim Cristian Romero has agreed personal terms with Atlético*

Football In brief

Refereeing

Massey-Ellis to stand down from officiating

The assistant referee Sian Massey-Ellis is to retire from officiating after a career which she says was "beyond anything I could ever have imagined". Massey-Ellis will start work with the Football Association as senior manager for women referees having called time on a Premier League career that began in 2010. In a statement, she said: "Football has taken me on a journey beyond anything I could ever have imagined. If my journey has helped change perceptions, open doors or inspire even one young person to believe they belong in the game, then I will consider that one of my greatest achievements." **PA Media**

Crystal Palace

Tomiyasu agrees deal after successful trial

Crystal Palace have confirmed the signing of Takehiro Tomiyasu after a successful trial period. The former Arsenal defender has been training with Palace and has done enough to earn an initial 12-month deal with the option of another two years. Tomiyasu becomes new manager Pierre Sage's second signing after the arrival of Óscar Mingueza on a free transfer. **PA Media**

Player safety

FA announces ban on solid pitchside barriers

The FA has banned solid pitchside barriers across the National League System after the death of former Arsenal academy player Billy Vigar, the governing body said yesterday. The FA launched a review of the safety of walls and boundaries last year after the 21-year-old sustained a significant brain injury when he hit his head on a concrete barrier beside the pitch while playing for seventh-tier side Chichester City. "Any existing solid brick, breeze block or concrete barriers must be removed as soon as practicable, or covered with protection if they cannot be removed for structural reasons," the FA said in a statement. **Reuters**

Carabao Cup

Lankshear sends Boro through with debut goal

Middlesbrough debutant Will Lankshear, a £10m summer signing from Tottenham, scored the only goal of the game in the 61st minute with an excellent first-time volley as his side beat Wrexham 1-0 in the first round. Danny Imray wasted a decent chance for Wrexham when he failed to make a proper connection from Callum Doyle's cross and the visitors went close again when Sam Smith fired a low shot into the legs of Sol Brynn. Boro almost doubled their lead with three minutes remaining but Morgan Whittaker's low strike rebounded off the post. **PA Media**

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City rebuff £38.5m opening bid by Barcelona for Rodri

Ed Aarons

Manchester City have rejected an offer of £38.5m (€45m) from Barcelona for Rodri and want at least £60m before allowing Spain's World Cup-winning captain to depart.

Barcelona have emerged as Rodri's preferred destination after talks with Real Madrid broke down this week. It is understood that the 30-year-old, who is now in the final year of his contract at City, has agreed personal terms with the Spanish champions after indicating that he would like to return to his homeland following the departure of Pep Guardiola.

Rodri moved to the Etihad in 2019 from Atlético Madrid and has turned down the offer of a lucrative extension. Yet City are believed to be adamant that he will not be allowed to leave for less than their asking price. Barcelona are continuing negotiations in the hope of reaching a compromise.

Rodri is coveted after winning the Golden Ball at the World Cup

Rodri, who won the World Cup Golden Ball as the tournament's best player last month, spoke to Barça's manager, Hansi Flick, and sporting director, Deco, about a potential move on Wednesday.

The Spanish champions will be without Frenkie de Jong for several months after the Netherlands midfielder sustained a knee injury and have targeted Rodri as a replacement. He has had minor surgery on his back and will miss most of City's pre-season programme.

City have signed Elliot Anderson from Nottingham Forest for £116m and remain in negotiations with Lille over a deal for Ayyoub Bouaddi. The Morocco midfielder could cost up to £80m but they could be tempted to bring in a more experienced replacement for Rodri should he depart, with Chelsea's Enzo Fernández among those thought to be under consideration. The 25-year-old is also wanted by Real, whose manager, José Mourinho is said to not to have taken well news of being gazumped by their great rivals. Reports in Spain have claimed that the 63-year-old is unhappy after making the signing of a central midfielder his priority on returning for a second stint at the Santiago Bernabéu.

Real have already brought in the winger Yan Diomande for £115m and Marc Cucurella, Bernardo Silva, Ibrahima Konaté, Denzel Dumfries and Carlos Espí, so they may have to balance the books by selling either Aurélien Tchouaméni and Eduardo Camavinga if they want to pursue the Argentinian Fernández.

The blueprint: Jay-Z's agency makes waves in the market

Vinícius and Diomande are among more than 100 players represented by company owned by the hip-hop legend

Ed Aarons

In the end there was a clear winner. And Jay-Z's latest victory came only 24 hours after the first record featuring him actually rapping for four years had been released by his wife, Beyoncé, on an extended remix pack of Morning Dew (Donk).

These days, the man who remains one of the most influential artists in hip-hop has his fingers in many pies, from the streaming service Tidal and his own streetwear brand, to champagne and cognac. But it is Roc Nation Sports – an offshoot of his entertainment company of the same name founded in 2008 – making headlines in the summer transfer window.

Established five years later in partnership with Creative Artists Agency, it began mainly representing players from the NBA, NFL and MLB, including Kevin Durant. Bayern Munich's Jérôme Boateng was the first football client, in 2015, before Roc Nation Sports International (RNSI) was established four years later with a focus on stars at big European clubs.

Based in London, it now has more than 100 players on its books, including Vinícius Júnior – the Brazil forward who signed a lucrative new contract with Real Madrid this week believed to be worth around €25m. That came after Arsenal had been linked with a blockbuster move for the 26-year-old.

In July 2023 RNSI took over the successful Brazilian agents TFM – who already represented Vinícius, Gabriel Martinelli, and Endrick – and renamed it Roc Nation Sports Brazil.

Real upped their offer and Vinícius stayed, a decision set to cost them the chance to sign Rodri

RNSI's big stars rising in value

Vinícius Júnior and Yan Diamande have sealed lucrative new deals this summer

NICK POTTS/PA; RICO BROUWER/SOCCRATES/GETTY

In negotiations that have lasted two years, it had hoped to persuade Real to increase their star asset's salary to €30m a year to match Kylian Mbappé, and allowed his contract to enter its final 12 months in an effort to drum up interest elsewhere. While Arsenal – now exploring other attacking options including Everton's Iliman Ndiaye – are believed to have been willing to pay a big fee for Vinícius, it is understood that they thought signing him on a free transfer next season was more likely.

Nonetheless, Real upped their offer and Vinícius stayed. It is a decision that looks likely to cost them the chance to sign Rodri from Manchester City after Barcelona stole a march on their great rivals.

On the same day as the new six-year contract for Vinícius was announced, Yan Diomande flew to the Spanish capital to complete his record £115m transfer from RB Leipzig. The 19-year-old – who has made only 46 appearances at senior level for the German club and for Leganés in the Spanish second division but is already the most expensive African player in history – was pictured with his agents, Nathan Campbell and Kareem Gbaja on a private jet. RNSI has been reported to have been paid up to £17m in commission and fees.

A long-running saga that began when Liverpool had a £70m bid rejected by Leipzig in June ended with Diomande signing a seven-year deal at the Bernabéu on Thursday. It has provided a telling insight into the mechanisms of a modern transfer, with every week bringing a fresh twist. Having been told they must pay in excess of £100m to sign Diomande, Paris Saint-Germain withdrew from the race at the end of July after releasing a statement that said the European champions "will not engage in the inflationary and manipulative games of certain player agents".

RNSI has also had to fend off two legal challenges, including one from the former Bournemouth winger Max Gradel who claims that his agency, Maxidel Management, had an existing agreement with Diomande. Gradel has filed a complaint with Fifa, although world football's governing body did not block the player's move to Real. Dez Bamba – who is president of Diomande's first club, AFI Sud Comoé in Côte d'Ivoire – has said that the winger was persuaded to join RNSI after receiving a call from Vinícius. RNSI has not commented on the case.

Meanwhile, the Rainbow World Group instigated proceedings at the high court in London and the British Virgin Islands against Diomande in mid-June "to enforce binding image rights and intellectual property agreements tied to his early career development". It is claimed Rainbow invested significant resources in the winger, including taking him for trials at Chelsea, Bournemouth, Crystal Palace and Newcastle before he was signed by Leganés. RNSI has not commented on the case.

Given Diomande's meteoric rise, perhaps it is no surprise that clubs are flocking to invest in African academies. Jeff Luhnow – the former general manager of the Astros and St Louis Cardinals who won three World Series baseball titles and owns Leganés as part of his Blue Crow network of clubs – told the Guardian last year Diomande was expected to be the first of many after they set up recruitment and development programmes in several African countries, including Ghana and Zambia, in the past several years. "We've got more players like that in our pipeline," said Luhnow.

RNSI announced in November that it has signed eight young African stars, including the Ghana Under-17 midfielder Joseph Narbi and Francis Gomez, a Gambian winger currently at AC Horsens in Denmark. "We believe Africa is a hotbed of untapped footballing potential, and our expansion here is a natural progression of our global vision," said Campbell.

In the dog-eat-dog world of football agents Jay Z's new kids on the block are certainly making their presence felt.

West Ham power struggle clouds club's fresh start in second tier

The future is unclear after relegation, with boardroom moves afoot, but Hammers remain promotion favourites

John Brewin

There have been 10 summers of West Ham's London Stadium tenancy and a number of winters of discontent. As the Hammers kick off the new season today, a Carabao Cup first-round fixture with Portsmouth is a stark reminder of reduced circumstances, further confirmation of last season's relegation from the Premier League. The summer has been as bleak as any of those winters, with a number of factors colliding to deepen the gloom of relegation.

Certain clubs, including West Ham back in 2011-12 when promotion was achieved at first time of asking under Sam Allardyce, have used the Championship to take a beat, to refresh and replenish. Can this be the case at West Ham 2026? The Hammers are short-odds favourites for promotion but behind the scenes it has been a summer of turbulence, particularly in the boardroom, where a power struggle is being fought.

Portsmouth will bring 9,000 supporters this afternoon but will David Sullivan be present? This week it was revealed the operators of London Stadium had recommended the former joint-chair (but still co-owner) stay away, because of the "potential for demonstrations and anti-social behaviour by some spectators".

It is expected that Sullivan will turn up, despite a fans' advisory board statement that his attendance would cause "offence and upset". It has been suggested that he wants to enjoy the coming season as a fan and is happy to bide his time before any consideration of selling his 38.8% stake. Considering his personal circumstances, his attendance would be a brazenly unpopular act. On 25 May, when relegation was confirmed despite a home win over Leeds, Sullivan was forced to leave the stadium early for his own safety.

Sullivan continues to deny allegations of sexually exploitative and predatory behaviour towards women over several decades made by the BBC's Panorama documentary in early June, though he stepped down from his role on the eve of the broadcast "to avoid disruption to the club while he addresses the matter privately".

Even before those allegations became public, Sullivan was a lightning rod, lambasted for his stewardship of a club in vertiginous decline since winning the Europa Conference League in May 2023. The £100m fee received for Declan Rice that summer was frittered away. Fellow Prague hero Jarrod Bowen, the club captain, has pledged to stay on, tasked with leading the club back up.

Until his defenestration Sullivan had acted as the club's de facto director of football, often to the frustration of those in the football department. His chief ally, Karren Brady, stepped down in April as storm clouds gathered, severing a working relationship that dated as far back as 1990.

Among the club's support, 50,000 season tickets have been sold for the attempt at re-entry to the Premier League. The overriding desire among fans is for Sullivan to completely depart the scene. His announced departure had installed a modicum of optimism.

Potential new sheriffs are circling but the picture is complicated, any future direction opaque as a result. As Sullivan stepped down the expectation was that Daniel Kretinsky, the Czech billionaire owner of Royal Mail who has owned 27% of West Ham since 2021, would make his move. Instead, this week, he cut that share down to just under 25%, though this was part of a strategy.

Last weekend, the familiar face of Amanda Staveley entered the picture. In July 2024 she departed Newcastle, after her leading role in bringing in the Saudi Arabian Public Investment Fund, but now Staveley wants to return to football. Last September, she was linked with a takeover at Tottenham, and it is suggested she will use a similar source of funding to engineer her move for West Ham. Among Newcastle fans, with their club faltering this summer, Staveley's energy is lamented. With her connections, some Hammers fan hope she could have a similar galvanising effect.

The key is the 25% that belonged to the late David Gold, Sullivan's former joint-chair. As Staveley loomed, Kretinsky appeared ready to take up his first refusal on purchasing that 25% from Vanessa Gold, David's daughter and current co-chair. Adding that to his 27% would take him beyond 50.1%, leaving him liable for a formal takeover offer. But shifting 2% to a Czech ally, the entrepreneur Jakub Havrlant, now means he would be short of that obligation should he cut across Staveley's ambitions by buying Gold's stake. Sullivan's shares also hold the balance of power and Staveley's next move is keenly awaited.

While that plays out, what of football? The arrival of free agent, the former Brighton and Ajax defender, Joël Veltman, was the first addition of a summer where the sales of Mateus Fernandes to Tottenham and Crysencio Summerville to Al-Hilal fetched a collective £140m, commensurate to a year of Premier League TV money. Youth product Freddie Potts' departure to Club Brugge for £10m disappointed some fans. Needs must if further players are to arrive. There is interest in Ireland's World Cup playoff hero Troy Parrott, the striker at AZ Alkmaar, though attracting players to the Championship has its difficulties.

In the dugout remains Nuno Espírito Santo, who stayed when his departure had been expected. Nuno's zen-like calm is required at a club where panic regularly sets in. The vacuum created by Sullivan's situation, relegation and lack of transfer business heightens anxieties. A new season has arrived, with uninviting league fixtures against Burnley, Charlton, Watford and Wolves by 1 September. Karim Virani, previously a club employee who departed in 2020, more recently at Glasgow Rangers, has returned as interim chief executive. Attempts are being made to stitch West Ham into a semblance of unity.

This summer, the London Stadium played host to concerts from Take That and Metallica, and staged the Diamond League athletics meet in July, where Josh Kerr broke the world mile record. Thursday saw a bid confirmed to stage the 2029 World Athletics Championships, following an impasse between the club and the stadium owners. Further reminders that West Ham's home will never be fully their own, 10 years after departing the Boleyn Ground.

Such were the terms Sullivan, Gold Sr and Brady agreed for a stadium that fans continue to resent, where Sullivan is unlikely to be made to feel welcome.

The London Stadium years

	Prem	FAC	Carabao	Europe*
2016-17	11th	3rd	QF	PO
2017-18	13th	4th	QF	
2018-19	10th	4th	4th	
2019-20	16th	4th	3rd	
2020-21	6th	5th	4th	
2021-22	7th	5th	QF	SF
2022-23	14th	5th	3rd	Winners
2023-24	9th	3rd	QF	QF
2024-25	14th	3rd	3rd	
2025-26	18th▼	QF	2nd	

* All Europa League campaigns except Conference League in 2022-23.
PO = play-off round.
Cup columns show round reached

Nuno's zen-like calm is required – there are attempts to stitch together a semblance of unity

▲ *Club captain Jarrod Bowen has pledged to stay and is tasked with leading the Hammers back to the top flight*
NURPHOTO/ SHUTTERSTOCK

▶ *The former co-chair David Sullivan denies allegations made about sexually exploitative behaviour made in a BBC Panorama documentary*
JUSTIN SETTERFIELD/ GETTY IMAGES

Cricket

Root's masterful cameo shows risk of Test captaincy return

Trip to the Hundred to watch batting exhibition shows what England could be losing amid demands of leadership

Ali Martin

My wife and I walked the kids down the hill to Edgbaston last Saturday afternoon, where our latest attempt at cricket indoctrination was the Birmingham Phoenix versus Welsh Fire game in the men's Hundred.

Though a one-sided defeat for the hosts - the Phoenix women at least got the win earlier in the day - it was decent enough, with the youngest (six) the only one to get restless before some tactical popcorn lifted spirits towards the back end of the game. The kindness of strangers meant she was happy regardless, having been gifted two foam meerkat paws and a giant red/orange Phoenix flag that looks as if she now supports some obscure separatist movement in the Balkans.

Me? I was happy that everyone seemed happy but also privately wondered how sustainable the whole thing is. Now the ground was close to sold out, the TV cameras were in, Jude Bellingham was signing autographs and the amount of Phoenix merch worn in the stands suggested it has secured a local footprint. But knowing the figures involved, the economics instinctively felt questionable.

Take Usman Tariq, as one small example. Pakistan's bandana-wearing mystery spinner is a fun, interesting cricketer. But if he bowls his allocation of 20 balls in the eight games Phoenix play - the knockout stage is now beyond a poorly assembled men's squad - it adds up to only 160 deliveries for £140,000 in pay. That's just shy of £900 a pop, given he does not bat and is a bit slapstick in the field.

It is only a mid-range deal, with the men's salary pots up 45% this year to £2m per squad and the women's teams up 100% to £880,000. But while payment now falls on the new team owners, the broadcast deal, which runs to the end of 2028, also encompasses international cricket and county tournaments. Until the rights are broken up, the true value of the Hundred is slightly unknown beyond the vast sums teased out of investors hoping for a return. You wonder whether Test cricket, still the big beast in England at least, might be subsidising its younger sibling in the meantime.

Still, for all those thoughts, or the slightly forced-fun feel to the assault of pyrotechnics, music and hyperactive stadium announcers, there was something for grumpy guts here to enjoy. It came in the chase, as Joe Root gracefully stroked his first three deliveries to the rope to begin a frictionless unbeaten half-century that sat in contrast to the freefalling Phoenix in the first innings.

Granted, the pressure was minimal and the mastery my kids didn't necessarily realise they were witnessing was capped by a 100-ball limit. But it was still a snapshot of pure Root, all balance and poise as he pierced the infield with Swiss clock timing, picked off his runs and killed the contest. It was only with the finishing line in sight that Root wowed them with his pancake-flip reverse scoop.

In an ideal world this would be Root until the day he calls time, just batting and batting and batting. Preferably in the whites of England, ticking off the runs that with a bit of luck should take him past Sachin Tendulkar's record of 15,921 in Test cricket, and helping the team secure some much-needed wins in the process.

Things are far from ideal, however. Having spent nearly five years as England's captain previously, a job that ground him down and turned into an "unhealthy relationship", Root has dutifully agreed to take on the position once more. Aged 35, it is unlikely to be as long a stint as before but inherent is the risk that the extra bandwidth required will cap the output of their premier player.

Root's runs were not the issue even as the team malfunctioned at the end of his previous spell in charge. But if this return to the job is a 12-month holding pattern - if England are waiting for Harry Brook to mature and get past the 2027 World Cup before stepping up - Root may be less inclined to return to the ranks thereafter. Unburdened, he looks like he could bat on into his 40s like Graham Gooch.

In Root's favour in the meantime is the new head coach, Stephen Fleming, who before his 17 years on the Twenty20 circuit was an astute tactician as New Zealand's Test captain. In theory he should cover off Root's past shortcomings and perhaps lighten the load in terms of man management. According to Moeen Ali, who has played under Fleming, he "takes the pressure off players and takes it on himself".

Problem is, Fleming will not be in place for the three-match series against Pakistan that starts on 19 August - Marcus Trescothick will stand in - leaving Root a bit exposed initially. And if a captain is only as good as their bowlers, he will now be marshalling an attack that, in the last two or so years, has lost more than 2,000 wickets of nous through the retirements of Stuart Broad, Ben Stokes, Jimmy Anderson et al.

This rebuild phase was always going to come, of course, but you still look at the broader set-up - much of the same management still in place - and wonder how sustainable this all is too; whether the new approach will truly deliver for England's flagship, revenue-driving team or if it is a bit of short-term workaround.

Like the Hundred, only time will tell. English cricket has made its choice.

Joe Root returns as Test captain for the series against Pakistan

Opener Gay in injury scare

Emilio Gay has suffered an injury scare, retiring hurt with a shoulder injury while batting for Durham. The England opener, who is in the squad to face Pakistan later this month, was lining up against Middlesex in a Metro Bank One-Day Cup tie at Chester-le-Street when he was forced from the field. The left-hander appeared to be feeling some discomfort in his right shoulder and the issue came to a head when he hit Toby Roland-Jones for four past mid-on, immediately clutching the joint before signalling for the physio. He continued to wince in pain and eventually departed for the pavilion on nine not out seeking further assessment by the club's medical staff. PA Media

Flintoff makes surprise early exit as England Lions coach

Ali Martin

Andrew Flintoff has decided to step down as the head coach of England Lions with immediate effect before his winter spell working in Australia's Big Bash League (BBL).

The former all-rounder, 48, has been in charge of England's second string since September 2024 and had been given the all-clear to leave this winter's Lions tour of South Africa early to take up his new role at BBL side Sydney Thunder.

But the England and Wales Cricket Board announced yesterday evening that Flintoff has left the role. He is said to have decided the BBL job - plus TV work and family commitments - means he cannot commit fully to the Lions.

▲ *Andrew Flintoff has been England Lions coach since September 2024*

In an ECB statement, Flintoff said: "Unfortunately I've made the decision to step away from my role with the Lions. Not only have I enjoyed my time having the opportunity to work with the best young cricketers in the country, but have taken great pride in seeing them develop."

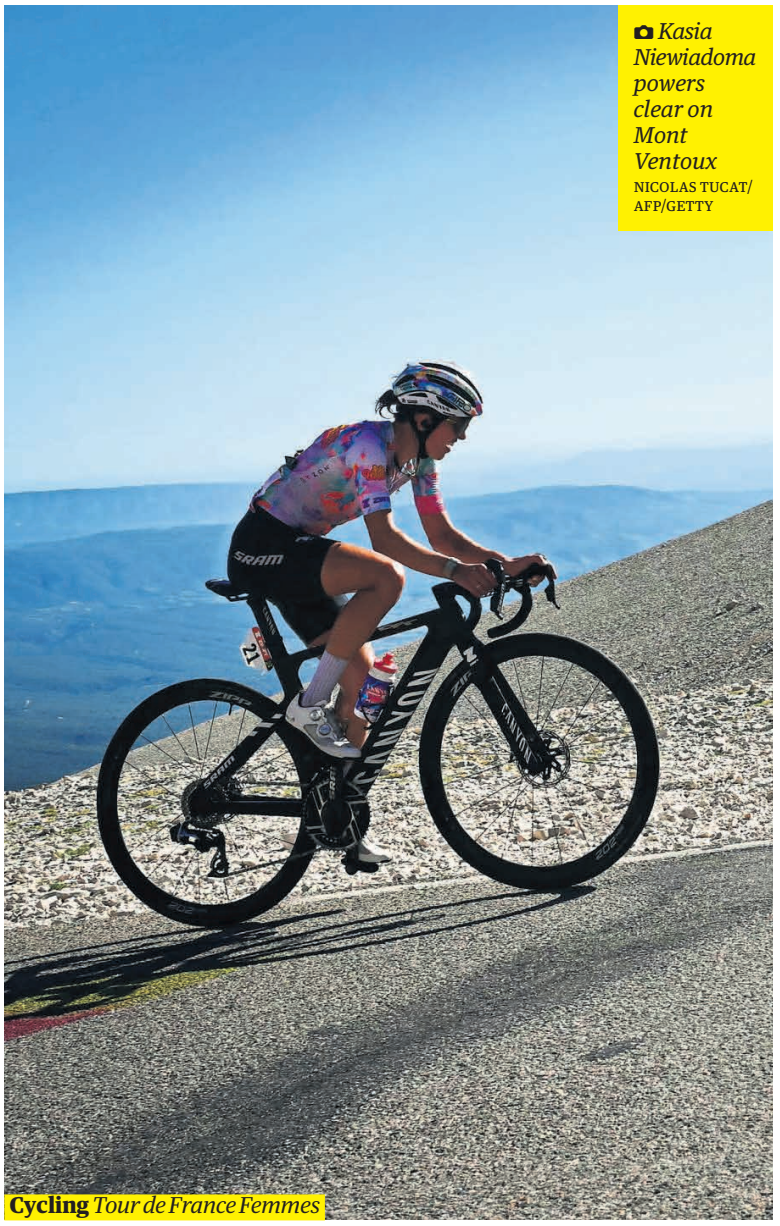
Flintoff's departure is somewhat abrupt, with Rob Key, the England men's team director, having moved to defend his former teammate and close friend last week amid recent criticism of his role with the Lions team.

"We've been incredibly fortunate to have him do it," said Key. "I thought it was disrespectful for people to say that he shouldn't have been doing it. He's been outstanding in that job, and we've been incredibly fortunate to have him."

Flintoff had recently been negotiating with the counties over player availability for the quasi-Lions XI that will serve as warm-up opposition for Pakistan's Test squad in a four-day match at Beckenham starting on Wednesday.

Mike Yardy, the head coach of England Under-19s, will now run that team - officially the Professional County Club Select XI - using young players not currently in the Hundred or not required by their counties in the Metro Bank One-Day Cup.

Meanwhile, England's senior squad to face Pakistan in the first Test at Headingley, which starts on 19 August, has suffered an injury doubt, with the opener Emilio Gay having retired hurt while batting for Durham with an apparent shoulder problem. Ollie Pope, a middle order player, is currently the reserve batter in the squad and so a full-time opener may have to be called up if Gay's injury proves significant.



Kasia Niewiadoma powers clear on Mont Ventoux
NICOLAS TUCAT/AFP/GETTY

Cycling *Tour de France Femmes*

Niewiadoma storms to stunning Ventoux victory and slender yellow jersey lead

Pole leaves rivals Reusser and Vollering behind on epic climb to take overall charge

Jeremy Whittle
Mont Ventoux

Kasia Niewiadoma took a spectacular solo victory on the legendary Mont Ventoux, securing a slim overall lead in the Tour de France Femmes after leaving behind her fellow race favourites Marlen Reusser and Demi Vollering.

"It's hard to describe my feelings because I'm still blown away by what just happened," Niewiadoma, who won the yellow jersey in 2024, said of the first Tour stage victory of her career.

In one of the most memorable climbing performances on the fearsome Giant of Provence, the 31-year-old Polish rider took back the best part of two minutes on Reusser, who had led the race since Tuesday's individual time trial. With two stages remaining Niewiadoma leads overall by 15sec from Vollering, the 2023 champion. Reusser trails by 39sec in third after stage seven.

Vollering's initial attack, which came on one of the climb's few hairpins, the Virage du Bois, was promptly closed down by Reusser and Niewiadoma, who, just as they had at Mont Brouilly on stage five, stuck doggedly to the Dutch rider's wheel.

Their collective effort was enough to force the issue, and the trio rode ahead to contest the stage. Niewiadoma's decisive acceleration came just under 10km from the summit, after she, Reusser and Vollering had moved ahead of the front group. Vollering and Reusser seemed more focused on each other, hesitating as Niewiadoma went clear. That sealed their fate.

Since its rebirth in 2022, Niewiadoma has always finished on the podium of the Tour, and her epic duel with Vollering on Alpe d'Huez in 2024 may yet be replayed in this weekend's racing in the hills around Nice.

"It means the world to me to get the yellow jersey by winning on the Ventoux," she said. "A lot of work went into it. Each year you have to come to the Tour even stronger than the year before because the level is going up so much."

Niewiadoma's pace took her clear on the approach to Chalet Reynard, while Reusser and Vollering appeared to be riding through treacle. It was a tactical stalemate that was finally broken when Vollering attacked Reusser in the final kilometre to finish second on the stage. Reusser crossed the line in a weary fourth place but there was plenty of suffering elsewhere on a stage in which a number of big names fell by the wayside.

Among those to leave even before the stage started was Anna van der Breggen of SD Worx-Protime, who dropped out yesterday morning. The 36-year-old Dutch rider, who finished second overall in the Vuelta and third in the Giro earlier this year, was described as "not feeling at her best". "We kept hoping she would start to feel better as the race progressed, but unfortunately that improvement never came. We decided not to take any unnecessary risks," said the sports director Danny Stam.

Even on the less arduous slopes, before the notoriously steep bend at Saint-Estève that signals the start of the official climb, the peloton was dramatically reduced. Multiple riders fell away as the gradient increased. Early casualties of the pacesetting included the defending champion, Pauline Ferrand-Prévot, and Kim Le Court, winner of stage six, both of whom definitively waved goodbye to any lingering thoughts of a high overall finish. Ferrand-Prévot's Visma Lease-a-Bike teammate Femke de Vries was another who suffered as the Ventoux's gradients bit into tired legs and the pair joined forces in a bid to limit their losses.

At the front, Reusser's Movistar team sought to control any attacks, but Vollering's FDJ United-Suez proved equally as resilient. Noemi Rüegg made a huge effort to set the pace for the EF Education-Oatly team leader, Cédrine Kerbaol, but was eventually swept away by Vollering's accelerations. Niewiadoma spent time training on the Ventoux in June with her husband, the former professional Taylor Phinney, saying she sold the idea to him as a "romantic getaway".

There may be little love lost, however, between Niewiadoma and her rival Vollering in the Tour's final 48 hours. "We have a strong team," Niewiadoma said, "but I'm expecting a massive fight for everything – points, bonus seconds, everything – because the gap is so small."

Overall standings

1	K Niewiadoma (Pol)	24hr 7min 34sec
2	D Vollering (Neth)	+15sec
3	M Reusser (Swi)	+39sec
4	E Longo Borghini (It)	+2:59
5	A Niedermaier (Ger)	+3:21

Today Stage 8 Sisteron ▶ Nice
171.9km, flat stage
TV TNT Sports 1/HBO Max, 12.30pm

Boxing

Itauma eyes more Tyson comparisons in Hrgovic title tussle

Donald McRae

Moses Itauma was initially unmoved when hearing that his bout against Filip Hrgovic in London on 29 August had been upgraded to a fight for the vacant IBF world heavyweight title.

"I didn't really have any reaction," Itauma said. "I was like, if I'm fighting Hrgovic and I've got the opportunity for it to be a world title, then yeah, chuck it on the line. I didn't have any other feeling. I was taking Hrgovic serious – and, now the fight is for a world title, I'm still taking him serious. It's still the same fight, innit?"

But the 21-year-old soon admitted that he is sharply aware of the fact that, should he beat his Croatian rival, he will become the second youngest fighter to become a world heavyweight champion. Mike Tyson made history when, aged 20 years and four months, he won the WBC title after a brutal second round stoppage of Trevor Berbick in November 1986.

Tyson hit Berbick with such force that, after he went down heavily for a second time, the Jamaican veteran reeled across the ring, fell, got up, toppled over, staggered to his feet, and lurched into the opposite corner where he collapsed again.

"I've watched that fight, of course," Itauma said of an iconic moment in heavyweight history. "But Tyson's had his career. I'm still making my career. Of course I tried to set up a goal to become the youngest heavyweight world champion. I didn't achieve it, but I landed a fight with Dillian Whyte [a former world title challenger whom Itauma knocked out in less than two minutes last August]. So it's step by step."

In his most recent contest, Itauma was seriously impressive again when dispatching Jermaine Franklin in five rounds. Teddy Atlas, the outspoken boxing pundit who helped train Tyson at the outset of his career, was glowing in his assessment of Itauma. "That's the first heavyweight that actually matches Tyson's combination of speed and power," Atlas said. "The difference is how [Itauma] does it. Tyson did it in a very one-dimensional, aggressive way, coming forward, making you miss, making you pay. Itauma? He's got a lot of options. He's [multi-]dimensional. He can box, he can set traps, he can counterpunch. He can fight inside. He can do a lot of different things. He's got good intellect. He's got good technique."

Itauma was surprised when told of Atlas's favourable comparison. "Teddy Atlas said that? Really?"

He then responded more wryly, remembering the past animosity between the two men. "Teddy Atlas put a gun to Mike Tyson's head before, no? I think he just doesn't like Mike Tyson, so he's finding a way to dim his light. But Teddy Atlas saying that? I appreciate it."

After he made history against Berbick 40 years ago Tyson oozed brooding malevolence as he sneered: "I wanted to bust his eardrum. Every punch had bad intentions."

Asked if he wants to be similarly ferocious against Hrgovic, Itauma shrugged. "I just had an interview with the BBC, and they asked: 'What's the one thing that people don't know about Moses Itauma?' I said I don't actually want to be under the bright lights. But, with the way I'm going, it looks like I ain't got no choice."

Itauma added: "I think I'm learning how to deal with the media. When I first started as a professional, the problem is you're always talking about what you're gonna do, and it's like you haven't yet proved anything."

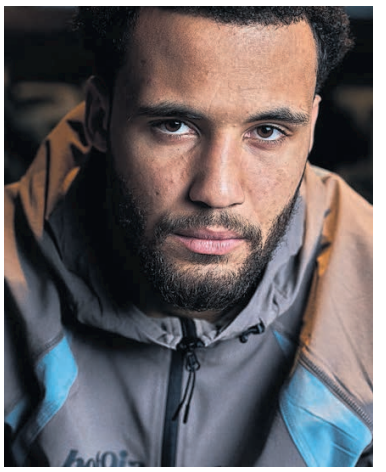
He has already captured the attention of the boxing hardcore. "I just try to be authentic when I'm on camera and it seems like I'm putting on entertaining fights," Itauma said. "But I'm not braggadocious. I'm not swaggerdocious. I don't do anything extraordinary outside the ring. I feel like [his increasing popularity] might be because I come across as myself. I don't try to be anyone else."

Itauma conceded that if he becomes a world champion his fame will intensify. "When I started progressing through my career I saw the negative side of it. I was like: 'I might not want this.'"

He is now starting to enjoy the adulation – just a little. "I remember before the Franklin fight, when everybody was singing 'Oh Moses Itauma' I just wanted to sit there and listen to it and appreciate it. But it's hard because I'm in the ring, fighting. You don't want to be starstruck because obviously you get caught out."

In a clear warning to himself, Itauma said: "If I don't get past Hrgovic, there ain't gonna be no stadium fights or nothing." Addressing Hrgovic's challenge Itauma stressed: "He's a very good fighter. He's only had one defeat [against Daniel Dubois] and lost because of a cut. Shit, I'm in for a long night. But I'll be all right."

Then, in a moment which carried a mild echo of Tyson, Itauma bristled slightly when asked if he was preparing to become world champion by winning on points. "Ah man, nobody comes to watch heavyweights to see two guys go to points. If you're watching the heavyweight division, you want to see some knockouts."



▲ *Moses Itauma says he is 'not braggadocious, not swaggerdocious'*

▼ *Sky Sports' Ewen Murray (left) with Ewan Murray*
GARY CALTON/THE GUARDIAN

A tale of two Murrays: when Ewan met Ewen

The Guardian's Ewan and Sky Sports' Ewen both work in golf media – much to the confusion of some irate fans

Ewan Murray

It started with an email in early 2011. "I don't know what it is like in your country, sir," wrote angry of Arizona. "But here in America we SPIT!!!" The penny eventually dropped. Ewen Murray's commentary on Sky Sports about Tiger Woods emptying his mouth on a putting surface in Dubai triggered a reaction fired directly towards Ewan Murray of the Guardian. Murray of Sky fame can still recall it.

"Tiger spat on the green with three groups playing behind him," Ewen says. "I remember my words. 'For a person who is an inspiration, not just to golfers but to everyone, there are times when he is arrogant and disrespectful.' I switched the mic off straight away. I knew there would be trouble. But if I don't say anything, people close to me are going to ask why I didn't comment.

"There was no bigger supporter of Tiger than me but the email you got, I got an awful lot more of 'Who the hell are you to tell … ' I wasn't telling, I was only saying it wasn't acceptable."

Months later, at the Scottish Open, I explained the email episode to Ewen. He was concerned at the impact of this tirade on me. My response related to my ongoing coverage of Scottish football, a domain where even mild opinion fuels abuse. Water, duck's back.

Fast forward to 2026 and we are together again, this time in the Open Championship's media centre. "If only we knew," says Ewen. Indeed. If only we knew. It is coincidental enough for two individuals whose names are one letter apart to work in media coverage of the same sport. Freakish in this instance is that we both joined Twitter in October 2010. Before long, confusion reigned. We may be almost three decades apart in age and of totally different stock – Ewen a former professional golfer who competed in the Open, me an erratic amateur – but social media criticism (plus the odd element of praise) intended for Sky's esteemed commentator flew this way. Lots and lots of it.

My response was to fight fire with fire in an alter ego; to take on the canteen commandos in a manner that is considerably more pretentious than Ewen in reality. The man himself soon roared with approval.

"I think if you don't have humour in life; and let's face it, there isn't much nowadays … " he says. "Laughter is the best medicine. I have found it all very funny and everyone I have spoken to about it is the same. What I should have been doing is answering some more of the messages meant for you but the trouble was the language was so bad. People just Google the name. 'That's him, there he is, Ewan Murray!'

"Some of your answers are very, very funny. Darren Clarke had tears coming out of his eyes when I showed him a few of them. He used to collapse with laughter. 'Look what he has written now.' Something about buggers upstairs not paying you properly, sinking stiff gins and dancing on the table. People started looking forward to the next one. I certainly do."

'If I say something wrong on air, I know what is coming to you. But you get the joy of answering'

Just for clarity: "I don't drink stiff gin any more. And I found dancing on tables was bad for the hamstrings."

There have been high-profile victims. Mick Fitzgerald, the famed jockey, praised *my* television commentary on a recent major. Rory McIlroy sought me out mid-round at the 2018 Open having been so tickled that a multiple world champion in another sport (who shall remain nameless) asserted, "you're not Ewen Murray" when we first met.

Other moments have flirted with danger. One punter threatened to seek me out in a public house close to Hoylake after some Ewan/Ewen antics during the Open of 2023. "He was going to find *me,"* Ewen says. "If people don't find it funny, if people take offence to that, I think they have a major problem. It's actually quite lucky to have this because so many people are involved; the players, the fans, the press, the TV. Because it is funny.

"If I say something wrong on air, I know what is coming to you. You get the brunt of it but you also get the joy of answering them. 'Do you know how many Opens I have played in? I have played with Arnold Palmer, you know.'" He is spurting with laughter once more.

This frivolity is a mere footnote on Ewen's rich career. He combines commentary skill with an unrivalled, intense knowledge of golf and its courses. Now 71, he is still going strong in the booth and intends to do so for some time.

Ewen's time in broadcasting began almost by accident in 1990, after an executive at Emirates airlines called a professional's shop in Sussex looking to offer Brian Barnes the gig at the second edition of the Desert Classic. "I said, 'I'll do it,'" Ewen says. "That was the start, a two-minute phone call. They sent me an air ticket and £500. I was lucky in that I had just finished playing so I knew all the players. I knew their strengths, their weaknesses and their characters. I still have the tapes."

He had lost his European Tour card a year earlier. Ewen's confidence, primarily on the greens, had left him. "Too much negativity," he says of his mindset. "When I was a kid, it was the other way round. I would dream then about hitting shots and they were all good shots. As I got older, that changed. I could see the end coming; then there was a big problem. What do you do now?"

He left home in Edinburgh at 18 for an assistant professional's job at Walton Heath. "I sat on the bed and thought 'What the hell have I done?' I had no car. My wage was £5 a week, my digs was £5 for the week." Teaching, playing, commentating. A life in golf was colourful enough before online mischief-making. Not that all condemnation is swatted aside.

"I ignore it unless I think they might be right," Ewen says. "Constructive criticism is vital in life. I haven't had it too bad, though. Nowhere near as bad as you." Long may it continue.

Swing and a hiss When the Guardian's man masquerades as Sky's

"Contrary to your comments – Dubai have now moved weekends to Saturday/Sunday from previously Friday/Saturday as mentioned." *Jan 2022*
EM: Gary, if I want to know the days of the week, I'll consult a calendar. Not a back seat driver on Twitter. If you want lifestyle chatter, take out a Hello subscription. Yours in golf.

"Are you not at the Phoenix Open this week? Missing your lovely Scottish voice." *Feb 2023*
EM: Alas, Syl.. I'm at the bottom of a Tanqueray 10 bottle in deepest Sussex. Pringle sweater on, Dire Straits playing. Lamb madras earlier demolished. Take it up with The Buggers Upstairs. Yours in golf

"Really miss your excellent commentating. Have you retired?" *Feb 2023*
EM: Not so much "retired" John as put out to grass by The Buggers Upstairs. 58 years of impeccable commentary and not so much as a carriage clock by way of thanks.

The young thrusters – Instagram types – have taken over. Yours in golf

"The lads need to sort out the delay that's going on between the broadcast and the commentary. Beemer asking a ball to stop when it's already gone into the water." *Players Champ, 2023*
EM: When you have a problem with your ears, do you phone your podiatrist? Production types – common lackeys – are nothing to do with me. Take it up with them. Yours in golf

"Matthew Jordan's home town is West Kirby not Liverpool … for the avoidance of doubt the city of Liverpool is some 11 miles away from Hoylake on the other side of the Mersey!" *The Open, 2023*
EM: Tell you what, George: why don't you pitch up at my booth with a map of Liverpool in your hand? You'll discover I can ram it into a place that doesn't have a postcode. Yours in golf

"Should be a prize for how many times Sky say ´back in the day'. Ageing commentators doing zero for inspiring the next generation." *Players Championship, 2023*
EM: And what are you doing to "inspire the next generation"? Sitting at home in your Y-fronts, shouting the odds on Twitter. Turn over to 5 Live and give me peace. Yours in golf

"Why oh why were we subjected to 4 hours of Faldo droning on? Presumably yourself and Coltart were face down in the members bar?!" *Masters, 2024*
EM: What goes on tour, stays on tour, my friend. I can however safely assure you that a gentleman's measure at Augusta National would knock out a horse.

"I very much hope we will hear you fronting @SkySportsGolf soon. The Players?" *Mar 2026*
EM: Alas … The Buggers Upstairs seem determined to put me out to pasture. I have been offered only lower tier dross for the season so rightly told them to go forth and multiply. Swing freely my friend

‘On the tube to work, I was like: oh God, I’ve messed up my life’

Georgia Hunter Bell regretted hanging up her spikes at 23. Six medals later, she is ready for gold at the Europeans

Sean Ingle

‘I grew up and was always just good at running,” says Georgia Hunter Bell, as she remembers the moment she felt her career was over at 23. “I always thought that I would be a professional athlete, go to the Olympics, all of that. So it was quite brutal when I had to make peace with the fact that it was not going to happen.”

At that stage Hunter Bell’s body was broken. Her teenage promise – she was the UK’s top 15-year-old having run a 2min 8sec 800m – worn away by injuries aggravated by overtraining in the US collegiate system. She retired; found a job in tech; didn’t run on the track for five years. And then came a comeback straight out of a Hollywood feel-good movie.

Over the past two years, the 32-year-old has won six major medals – including an Olympic 1500m bronze, world 800m silver and world 800m indoor and Commonwealth golds. And this week she arrives at the European Athletics Championships in Birmingham as Britain’s hottest favourite for gold in the 1500m.

But to understand Hunter Bell’s immense drive and fortitude – and what has made her the athlete she is today – you have to go back to the dark days, when her youthful dreams were struck down by life’s harsh realities.

“Actually the first year that I quit, I was like: ‘Thank God, I’m done,’” she says. “Because it had got quite sour towards the end. I was resenting it. I was racing badly. I was injured. I was completely falling out of love with it.

“But a year or two later, when I was back in London and getting the tube to work, I was just kind of being like: ‘Oh my God, I am an adult now. This is it. And I have kind of messed up my life’.

“I knew that the potential was there and it was never fulfilled, and I really struggled to deal with that,” she adds. “And there were a few bad years where I wasn’t very excited for life.”

She admits that the 23-year-old Georgia was a little lost. “When I look back, I feel really bad for her,” she says. “But that is now part of my strength. Because I’ve been through all of that, I have that perspective, and it makes me a way better athlete.”

The second-chance journey of a lifetime began with a March 2022 parkrun for fun in a not-too-shabby 5km time of 16min 14sec. Then, in November 2022, she reunited with her old coach Trevor Painter and his wife, Jenny Meadows, who guided Keely Hodgkinson to Olympic gold in Paris.

“They really made me believe,” Hunter Bell says. “They were looking at me keeping up with everyone. After one hill session, Jen pulled me in and was like: ‘You can run the Olympic qualifying time’ and that’s when I was like, ‘OK, I am going do this’. Then it went from ‘You can run the time’ to ‘You can make the team’ to ‘You can actually get a medal.’”

Meadows’s prophecy turned into reality. Days before her 30th birthday, Hunter Bell was able to quit her job to become a professional athlete. “Obviously they were a bit sad to see me go,” she says. “But they were like: ‘You’re living your dream. And to get another shot is so exciting’.”

And even at 32, Hunter Bell is still getting better.

This year, she is the second-fastest woman in the world over 1500m and the fifth-fastest over 800m. “It’s difficult deciding which to do because I feel like I’m actually pretty equal in both,” she says.

Her coaches can’t decide either. “Jen thinks there’s a lot more potential in the 800m, and then Trev thinks I have a better aerobic base, which is maybe suited for the 1500m a bit more,” she says, smiling.

What is clear is that she can beat anyone at either distance – as she proved by thrashing the 800m world champion Lilian Odira at the Commonwealth Games in a tactical masterclass.

Beating Odira proved something else too: she could handle the pressure of expectancy. “I used to relish being the underdog in 2024,” she says. “But I found it quite a hard adjustment to be favourite. Last year I was like: ‘Oh, I don’t love this: people are asking me to do press conferences, people are asking me how I’m going to win.’ And I made some mistakes in 2025, which were really important to learn from.”

Gold medals over 1500m at the world indoors in Torun and the 800m at the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow showed Hunter Bell is a fast learner. And, unsurprisingly, she goes into the Europeans as a hot favourite to win the 1500m, with only the French athlete Agathe Guillemot, the sixth fastest in the world this year, looking a danger.

So what has allowed her to keep improving? Hunter Bell is full of praise for Painter and Meadows, whose coaching focuses on high-speed efforts on the track – with little time for slow running. On weekends, for instance, she rides her bike for hours rather than doing a long run.

She also emphasises the importance of recovery. “You have to be quite disciplined with what you do in your spare time,” she says. “You’re almost trying to be horizontal for as much as you can during the day. When you’re not training or racing, you’re chilling out and letting your body recover.”

Training with Hodgkinson certainly doesn’t hurt either. So what has she learned most from the 800m Olympic champion?

“We’re at different phases in our life, but we get on really well,” she says. “She’s very chilled, which I’ve really learned from.

“At college, I would be very regimented. If something went wrong, I felt that everything had gone wrong. Whereas she’s very like: ‘Oh, I forgot my spikes. I’ll get some others.’ She goes with the flow and is very composed when she gets on the start line. She also really relaxes me, and she’s quite playful and fun.”

And what has she learned from you? “I would be interested to hear what she would say,” Hunter Bell laughs. “Maybe because I have achieved something that on paper you wouldn’t think is possible, that’s helped her see that you can actually do anything. And maybe I’ve helped her be on time more. I’m always like: you need to go!”

For now, Birmingham is foremost on her mind. But Hunter Bell admits that she wants to emulate Kelly Holmes by going for an 800m/1500m double at the Los Angeles Olympics in 2028.

She even talked with Holmes about attempting it last year at the world championships in Tokyo, before deciding against it. However, she believes it is a harder feat to achieve in the modern era.

“The idea of me winning a gold in the 800 and 1500 in LA is kind of unthinkable because the races are so quick, and what they demand from your body is so much,” she says. “They are almost flat out sprints always, whereas they used to be a bit more tactical.”

But given what she has achieved, would you dare bet against Hunter Bell defying sporting gravity again? Especially as she believes there is plenty left in her tank.

“I think my training age is a lot younger than 32, just because I didn’t have all those years of racing and being on the circuit,” she says. “Remember Kelly did her double Olympic gold at 34. Look at Messi at 39. What’s previously been seen as old has pushed way back.

“So everything is leading towards LA – that’s the north star.” And, like Hunter Bell, it is shining brighter than ever.

‘I knew that the potential was there and never fulfilled – I really struggled to deal with that’

TOM JENKINS/THE GUARDIAN

Georgia Hunter Bell absorbs her Commonwealth Games golden moment after winning the 800m

Rugby league *Super League*

Leeds stay top of table with stunning heist at Wakefield

Wakefield	**22**
Leeds	**24**

Aaron Bower
DIY Kitchens Stadium

Whisper it but perhaps that was the performance of a champion side. All week the talk had been about Wakefield and whether this could be the night they declared themselves as a Super League force in front of a sell-out crowd against Leeds.

In the end, they probably did that, despite the result. These two West Yorkshire rivals served up a classic under the Belle Vue lights but in the end, despite never leading until the 77th minute, Leeds mustered up all their strength and championship credentials to complete a comeback which began when they trailed by 16 points with half an hour left.

At that stage it felt inevitable that Wakefield would be going joint-top of the table with Leeds. Trinity, a Championship side two years ago, looked as though they were about to deliver their biggest statement yet that they could be about to end their 60-year wait for a major trophy. However, the Rhinos dug deep and found a way.

James McDonnell's try gave them hope before three minutes later Cameron Smith, the game's outstanding player who will play for Wakefield in 2027, scored to mean a 22-6 lead for Wakefield had suddenly been reduced to 22-18. As it entered the championship rounds, it was Trinity who blinked, as Chris Hankinson seized on a Jake Connor kick, with Connor converting to win it.

This was a result and a performance born out of Leeds and Brad Arthur's darkest moment together. Last year they were beaten in the final seconds by St Helens in the playoffs and the Rhinos spent all pre-season warning there would be no repeat.

"That's the evidence of us learning from it," Arthur said. "We've done the work. Under a bit of pressure we kept our composure. I challenged them at half-time to go right to the 80th minute … boy, they did it." Leeds were outplayed for large stretches here, with Wakefield good value for their 16-6 half-time lead.

Tries from Isaiah Vagana, Caleb Hamlin-Uele and Jayden Myers put Trinity in control. Brodie Croft's try just before the break gave Leeds hope but when Jack Sinfield scored against his former club to make it 22-6, it looked as though the momentum was back with Wakefield.

The Rhinos were on the ropes. But this group are built differently in 2026, with McDonnell's try starting the comeback and Hankinson's finishing it – with Leeds surviving a frantic final few moments to go four points clear with five games left.

▲ *Leeds try-scorer Cameron Smith (left) is embraced by his teammates*

With this win Leeds are now heavy favourites to finish top, which would result in their first piece of silverware in six years.

As for Wakefield, they will be bruised by this. Having lost by four to Wigan in the cup quarter-finals and now by two here to the league leaders, this was perhaps a subtle lesson again about the final step they still have to take. They should, however, take great pride from this – and heart from what they did for the most part if they meet Leeds again in the playoffs.

"The story this year is not over," Wakefield's coach, Daryl Powell, said. "Leeds might have got off tonight but I'm comfortable going against them in a playoff game. They're a great side but I watched us thinking if we play how we did in the first half we're a fair team to defend and play against."

One thing is for certain: if these two meet again under the lights at Old Trafford in eight weeks and serve up a repeat of this classic, nobody will be complaining.

Wakefield Rourke; Myers, Scott, Hall, Johnstone; Trueman, Sinfield; Lolesio, Smoothy, Rodwell, McMeeken, Vagana, Tevaga. **Interchange** Pitts, Hamlin-Uele, Faatili, Smith.
Tries Vagana, Hamlin-Uele, Myers, Sinfield.
Goals Sinfield 3.
Leeds Miller; Edgell, Handley, Bird, Newman; Croft, Connor; Oledzki, O'Connor, Jenkins, Hankinson, McDonnell, Watkins. **Interchange** Holroyd, Smith, Cassell, Lloyd.
Tries Croft, McDonnell, Smith, Hankinson.
Goals Connor 4. **Referee** Liam Moore.

Racing

Moore on track to lift Shergar Cup

Greg Wood
Guide to TV races

Ryan Moore returns to the riding lineup for the Shergar Cup meeting at Ascot today for the first time in 20 years and his Great Britain & Ireland team, captained by Saffie Osborne, should justify short-priced favouritism and see off its rivals.

All five of Moore's rides on the card are priced up at single-figure odds and he is 11-4 favourite to win the Silver Saddle for the day's leading rider. Osborne and Dylan Browne McMonagle, the third member of the team, also have obvious winning chances on the likely favourites **Hoseki (3.55)** and **Night Breeze (2.45)** respectively.

Ascot 1.35: Hold-up horse **Kendall Roy** should get the unrelenting pace he needs.

Newmarket 1.55: A Group Three with a couple of future Group One winners on the honour roll in recent seasons and Charlie Appleby's **Graceful Song** has potential.

Ascot 2.10: Hermetic is progressing nicely since joining Ian Williams's stable over the winter and should be well placed to strike.

Haydock 2.25: Sallaal should take this step up to Group Three company in his stride.

Ascot 2.45: Last year's winner, **Night Breeze**, stands every chance of improving his impressive record at this track.

Haydock 3.00: A limp return to action slightly dampens enthusiasm for **Fallen Angel** but Karl Burke's mare has a stone or more in hand of this field on her best form.

Ascot 3.20: Thunder Call was doing his best work at the finish when third at Newmarket last time out and should appreciate the stiffer finish.

Ascot 3.55: The fast-improving **Hoseki** showed plenty of determination to squeeze home by a short head over track and trip last time and can complete a four-timer off a 5lb higher mark.

Ascot 4.30: Ozat had a nightmare at Goodwood last time and deserves a chance to back up a fine run in the Royal Hunt Cup in June.

Greg Wood's tips

Ascot **1.35** Kendall Roy **2.10** Hermetic (nb) **2.45** Night Breeze **3.20** Thunder Call **3.55** Hoseki **4.30** Ozat (nap).
Haydock **1.50** Brighton View **2.25** Sallaal **3.00** Fallen Angel **3.34** Pellitory **4.09** Crafty Blue **4.40** Lost Signal **5.10** Suggy.
Newmarket **1.55** Graceful Song **2.30** Sanbona Warrior **3.05** Harlequin Dream **3.40** Castle Rock **4.14** Man Of Vision **4.50** Thornaby Pearl **5.23** Jack Langley. **Redcar** **2.02** Raggaas **2.37** Saxon Grace **3.12** Gorgeous Mr George **3.47** Sports Coach **4.19** Gwen Tennyson **4.57** Dubai Venture **5.31** Masaban.
Lingfield **5.40** Si White **6.10** Guernsey Lady **6.40** Shopaholic **7.10** Kanzi **7.40** Huscal **8.10** A Lott Of Kane. **Ayr** **5.27** Coul Blue **6.00** Harb **6.30** Tiger **7.00** Hale End **7.30** Mr Cool **8.00** Yaaser **8.30** Flying Moonlight.

Chess *British Championship*

Adams, nine-time winner, has first loss at event in 38 years

Leonard Barden

Michael Adams, the 54-year-old Taunton grandmaster aiming for a record-equalling 10th British title, began with three wins but in round four suffered his first championship defeat since 1988 when he resigned a lost rook endgame after 60 moves to the rising Ukrainian talent Svyatoslav Bazakutsa, 18, who lives in Liverpool.

Adams has won nine British titles, one short of Jonathan Penrose's record, but missed many championships in the 1990s and 2000s when he was campaigning for the world crown.

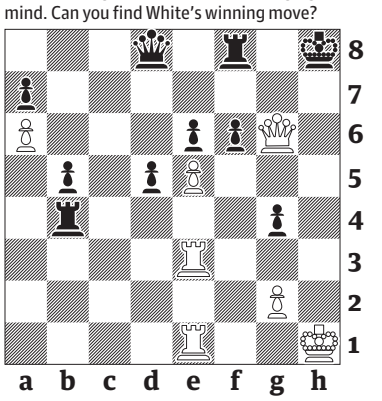
It was still a remarkable record of 87 classical British Championship games without a single defeat. The sequence included his 1989 victory, when he became the youngest ever winner at 17, a record which still stands, as well as his later triumphs in 1997, 2010, 2011, 2016, 2018 (when he won 3-1 in a playoff with Luke McShane which included a rapidplay loss), 2019, 2023 and 2025.

The 108-player 2026 British Championship, with a total prize fund of £34,000, finishes tomorrow at the University of Warwick in Coventry. There is a strong youthful challenge this year. Five of the eight leaders after the fifth round were under-21s, while four of them were still under-18s.

Bodhana Sivanandan, 11, beat a grandmaster for the fourth time in her fledgling career in Tuesday's fourth round and it was her most impressive victory yet, with 99% accuracy according to one computer evaluation. GM Ameet Ghasi is a seasoned performer, but Sivanandan strategically outplayed him.

Sivanandan's exceptional performance in this game arguably deserves recognition as the female equivalent of Bobby Fischer's 1956 Game of the Century against Donald Byrne, played when the future world champion was 13. Fischer's concept was grandiose, but the ensuing windmill tactics were relatively simple to calculate. Sivanandan, two years younger, used a more complex strategy to perfection.

4036 Willy Hendriks v Jeroen Bosch, German Bundesliga 2007. White (to move) is three pawns down, so Hendriks settled for a draw by perpetual check with Qh6+ and Qg6+. Later he discovered a subtle way to win, and showed the diagram to the Dutch legend Jan Timman, who at first also declared the game drawn before changing his mind. Can you find White's winning move?



4036 1 Rg1! wins. If 1...Qd7 2 Rh3+! gxh3 3 Qh6+ Kg8 4 gxh3+ Kf7 5 Rg7+ Ke8 6 Rxd7 and wins.

Results

Football

CARABAO CUP
First round

Middlesbrough Lankshear 61	(0) **1**	**Wrexham**	(0) **0**
Wolves Armstrong 14 André 34, López 43	(3) **3**	**Port Vale**	(0) **0**
Wycombe Henderson 39	(1) **1**	**Stevenage** Kemp 27, Magennis 90+5	(1) **2**

WILLIAM HILL SCOTTISH CHAMPIONSHIP

Partick Crawford 4, MacPherson 44og	(2) **2**	**Livingston**	(0) **0**

Rugby league

BETFRED SUPER LEAGUE
Castleford 0 Hull KR 44; Leigh 22 York 14; Wakefield 22 Leeds 24

Cricket

SECOND MEN'S ONE DAY INTERNATIONAL
Bready Afghanistan 299-8 (Ibra him Zadran 84, Sediqullah Atal 45). Ireland 207 (C Carmichael 62; Rashid Khan 6-34). Afghanistan beat Ireland by 92 runs.

METRO BANK ONE DAY CUP
Group A
Old Trafford Gloucestershire 270-6 (CT Bancroft 98, JMR Taylor 75). Lancashire 273-6 (KK Jennings 67, GP Balderson 56no, MF Hurst 48, JJ Bohannon 42). Lancashire beat Gloucestershire by four wickets.
Grace Road Warwickshire 220 (K Smith 57). Leicestershire 222-7 (NF Kelly 86, BGF Green 45no). Leicestershire beat Warwickshire by three wickets.
Chesterfield Northants 259-8 (GA Bartlett 55, LA Procter 53). Notts 261-4 (FW McCann 91, H Hameed 51, LW James 45no). Notts beat Northants by six wickets.
Taunton Somerset 368-9 (TA Lammonby 114, LP Goldsworthy 83, AM Vaughan 52). Surrey 180 (J Blake 47, RS Patel 40). Somerset beat Surrey by 188 runs.

Group B
Sophia Gardens Essex 312 (LM Benkenstein 140). Glamorgan 309-7 (T van der Gugten 118no, AJ Horton 85). Essex beat Glamorgan by three runs.
Scarborough Derbyshire 278-8 (MK Andersson 67, HRC Came 58). Yorkshire 281-5 (SM Whiteman 94, JH Wharton 75, GCH Hill 63no). Yorkshire beat Derbyshire by five wickets.
Riverside Durham 303-7 (AZ Lees 103, WMH Rhodes 65; N Sharma 4-46). Middlesex 307-7 (JB Cracknell 84, BBA Geddes 77). Middlesex beat Durham by three wickets.
Hove Sussex 333-9 (FJ Hudson-Prentice 68, JA Leaning 50, TJ Haines 40). Worcestershire 334-6 (JD Libby 109no, Kashif Ali 73, I Mohammed 44). Worcestershire beat Sussex by four wickets.

THE HUNDRED WOMEN
Edgbaston Birmingham 107-9 (EL Lamb 47). Leeds 111-1 (P Litchfield 71). Leeds beat Sunrisers by nine wickets.

THE HUNDRED MEN
Edgbaston Leeds 169-7 (RD Rickelton 65). Birmingham 124-8. Leeds beat Birmingham by 45 runs.

Tennis

ATP NATIONAL BANK OPEN (Montreal, Canada)
Third round: B Nakashima (US) bt T Droguet (Fr) 4-6 6-2 7-5; **R Jódar** (Sp) bt L Musetti (It) 6-4 6-3; **A Rinderknech** (Fr) bt F Tiafoe (US) 6-2 2-0 ret; **T Griespoor** (Neth) bt M Arnaldi (It) 3-6 6-4 6-3; **D Merida Aguilar** (Sp) bt A Michelson (US) 6-4 6-7 (4-7) 6-1; **B Shelton** (US) bt Z Bergs (Bel) 6-3 6-2; **B van De zandschulp** (Neth) bt H Hurkacz (Pol) 3-6 7-6 (7-4) 7-5.

WTA NATIONAL BANK OPEN (Toronto, Canada)
Third round: A Sabalenka (Rus) bt Zhang S (Chn) 6-3 6-4; **E Svitolina** (Ukr) bt A Potapova (Aut) 6-1 6-1; **A Korneeva** (Rus) bt I Jovic (US) 6-3 6-4; **E Rybakina** (Kaz) bt A Li (US) 6-2 7-5; **L Fernandez** (Can) bt M Andreeva (Rus) 6-1 6-4; **L Samsonova** (Rus) bt M Joint (Aus) 7-5 6-7 (3-7) 6-2.

Golf

PIF LONDON CHAMPIONSHIP (St Albans)
Leading second-round scores (GB/Ire unless stated): **135** A Huang (Can) 67 68. **136** C Hull 74 62. **138** L Hall 71 67. **139** K Bennett (Aus) 68 71; A Donegan 70 69; A Van Dam (Neth) 72 67. **140** A Hewson 74 66; S Tan (Sgp) 70 70. **141** L Sobrón Galmés (Sp) 71 70; E Spitz (Aut) 68 73.

Cycling

TOUR DE FRANCE FEMMES
Stage seven (La Voulte-s ur-Rhône-Mont Ventoux,144km): **1** K Niewiadoma (Pol) Canyon/Sram 4h 22min 53sec; **2** D Vollering (Neth) FDJ United-Suez +1:16; **3** E Longo Borghini (It) +1:42.
Overall standings: 1 K Niewiadoma (Pol) 24hr 7min 34sec; **2** D Vollering (Neth) +15sec; **3** M Reusser (Swi) Movistar +39sec; **4** E Longo Borghini (It) +2:59.

Fixtures

TODAY
Football (3pm unless stated)
Carabao League Cup
First round (*Sky Sports+* unless stated) AFC Wimbledon v Newport County; Barnsley v Wigan; Bradford v Rochdale; Bristol Rovers v Peterborough Utd; Bromley v Reading; Burnley v Notts County; Burton v Blackburn; Cambridge Utd v Barnet (1pm); Cardiff v Swindon; Cheltenham v Charlton (5.30pm); Colchester v Southampton (5.30pm) *SSF*; Crewe v Accrington Stanley; Derby v Lincoln City; Fleetwood v Chesterfield; Gillingham v Luton; Grimsby v Blackpool; Leicester v Northampton; Leyton Orient v Oxford Utd; Norwich v MK Dons; Preston v Huddersfield; QPR v Millwall (2pm); Rotherham v West Brom (5.30pm); Salford v Shrewsbury; Sheffield Wednesday v Bolton; Stockport v Doncaster; Stoke v Oldham; Swansea v Birmingham; Watford v Crawley; West Ham v Portsmouth
Enterprise National League
(*all Dazn*) Altrincham v Southend; Boreham Wood v Tamworth; Boston v Aldershot; Carlisle v Worthing; Eastleigh v Gateshead; Forest Green v Halifax; Fylde v Wealdstone; Harrogate v Solihull Moors; Hartlepool v Barrow; Hornchurch v Kidderminster; Scunthorpe v Yeovil; Woking v Sutton
William Hill Scottish Premiership
Dundee v Aberdeen; Hearts v Dundee Utd; Motherwell v Falkirk; St Mirren v St Johnstone
William Hill Scottish Championship
Arbroath v Inverness CT; Dunfermline v Ayr; Queen's Park v Raith; Stenhousemuir v Greenock Morton
William Hill Scottish League One
Airdrieonians v East Kilbride; East Fife v Cove; Hamilton v Alloa; Queen of the South v Peterhead; Ross v Montrose
William Hill Scottish League Two
Dumbarton v Clyde; Elgin v Forfar; Kelty v Stirling; Stranraer v Annan; The Spartans v Edinburgh City
Rugby league
Betfred Super League
Bradford v Warrington (3pm) *SS+*; Wigan v Toulouse (5.30pm) *SS+*
Cricket (11am unless stated)
The Hundred Men
MI London v Trent, the Oval (2.30pm) *SSC*; Southern v Manchester, Utilita Bowl (6pm) *SSC*
The Hundred Women
MI London v Trent, the Oval *SSC*; Southern v Manchester, Utilita Bowl (2.30pm) *SSC*

TOMORROW
Football (3pm unless stated)
Carabao League Cup
First round Mansfield v Sheffield Utd (4pm) *SSF*
William Hill Scottish Premiership
Hearts v Dundee Utd; Kilmarnock v Celtic (1.30pm) *SSF*; Rangers v Hibernian (4pm) *Premier Sports*
Rugby league
Betfred Super League
Huddersfield v Catalans (3pm) *SS+*
Cricket (11am unless stated)
Metro Bank One Day Cup
Group A Gloucestershire v Nottinghamshire, Cheltenham; Kent v Leicestershire, Beckenham; Northamptonshire v Somerset, Northampton; Warwickshire v Lancashire, Rugby
Group B Derbyshire v Middlesex, Derbyshire; Durham v Essex, Darlington; Glamorgan v Worcestershire, Sophia Gardens; Sussex v Hampshire, Hove
The Hundred Men
London Spirit v Birmingham, Lord's (6pm) *BBC Two/iPlayer/SSC*; Leeds v Welsh, Headingley (2.30pm) *SSC*
The Hundred Women
London Spirit v Birmingham, Lord's (2.30pm) *BBC Two/iPlayer/SSC*; Leeds v Welsh, Headingley *SSC*

Sport

Up, up and away

Niewiadoma claims Tour yellow with solo Ventoux ascent

Page 8 →

ILLUSTRATION: DAVID LYTTLETON

Vinyl destination

Super Furry Animals latest band to see the flip side of football's 'adjacent audience'

Emma John

As someone born on the cusp of the gen X-millennial divide, I am the perfect target for today's 90s nostalgia. I played my modest, teenage part in the Battle of Britpop (verbal skirmisher, Blur division); I fervently sang – and, God help me, believed – that Things Can Only Get Better. Super Furry Animals were a band I knew only distantly, via the transgressive thrill of that song they had with all the swearing in. And yet the news they'll be shirt sponsor for a Welsh football club this season has managed to whisk me straight back to a time when things seemed simpler, kinder and more hopeful.

Nearly three decades have passed since Super Furry Animals last had their logo on a football kit. Back in 1999, frontman Gruff Rhys and bassist Guto Pryce, both Cardiff City fans, persuaded their Bangor-born bandmates to lay down their north Wales allegiances for the duration of the Bluebirds' Welsh Cup run. The cup shirts cost them £2,000 and were, according to Rhys, knock-offs made for ice hockey. This year's beneficiaries are Cwmbran Celtic, just relegated from Wales's second tier. Cwmbran is the town where the band send their stage props for repair, and given the props in question are giant inflatable bears, you wonder whether they could get one installed in goal.

Super Furry Animals aren't the only 90s band involved: Scottish post-rockers Mogwai have sponsored the men's away strip, with 10% of the profits from all shirt sales going to a grassroots music charity.

There has traditionally been an element of patronage when famous musicians do football, from Elton John's time as chair of Watford, to Robbie Williams's 2024 elevation to Port Vale club president. The pattern is a repeating one: local lads (they're usually lads) make good, and want to give back to the team they've followed since they were little. Wet Wet Wet were the first to go down the shirt-sponsorship route with Clydebank in 1993. The team's shirts turned out to be a more timeless design than the loud, oversized suits that Marti Pellow's crew wore the day they unveiled them.

Slapping your logo on your home side's shirt was a charitable endeavour, rather than an investment. Nothing underscored this point better than Fatboy Slim's relationship with Brighton & Hove Albion. The DJ's record label first sponsored their shirts in the late 90s, back when the team's financial straits had left them flirting with extinction, and Tony Bloom's billions were still waiting to be won. It was particularly appropriate back then that Micky Adams's men should run out on to the field with their chests declaring them SKINT.

Musical match-ups have tended, therefore, towards the endearing, not the cool. Jake Bugg sponsored Notts County not to market his own music, but to evangelise the Midlands team on his global tours. And it's even cuter when bands have sponsored kids' teams. The late Lemmy of Motörhead was tickled by the thought of a Lincolnshire under-10s team sporting his Snaggletooth skull mascot on their fronts; unfortunately the resultant all-black kit too closely resembled referees' uniforms and the children were banned from wearing it in league matches. Still, the idea had an enduring appeal: the Prodigy, Biffy Clyro, Sleaford Mods and Franz Ferdinand have all paid for youth kits.

In the last couple of years, though, the relationship between bands and football teams has turned serious. The move to monetise the "adjacent audiences" of pop and sporting fandom means shirt sponsorship is no longer a way of artists showing their support, but a marketing and merchandising opportunity.

Spotify's deal with Barcelona got the ball rolling, with Coldplay, Karol G, Rosalía and Travis Scott each briefly appearing on the shirtfront, and limited-edition replicas costing more than £340 a pop. The footie-kit-as-streetwear trend means bands aren't "sponsors" any more, they're "collaborators". Hence Manchester United's pre-match shirts don't bear the name of the Stone Roses, just their album artwork. And while that may have baffled a few younger fans – the club's website ran a post explaining who the Madchester group were for the gen Z-ers – it still reflects a genuine connection. Ian Brown is a lifelong Red, and the team has walked out to This Is the One since Gary Neville first requested it two decades ago.

Creating a sporting look now involves an advanced grasp of fashion arithmetic

Whereas a year ago, if you'd been asked at a pub quiz what Paris Saint-Germain had in common with a K-pop band, or what Pink Floyd had to do with a Serie A team, you'd have been within your rights to say "nothing". The answer, now, is clothing ranges – PSG teamed up with the girl group Blackpink to optimise fan engagement in Asia, while Inter marked the 50th anniversary of the album release of Wish You Were Here. All this can be confusing for the simple-minded sports lover like me. What is a culture-forward lifestyle capsule, anyway? It sounds like something Musk and Bezos want to blast to Mars in. Creating a sporting look now involves an advanced understanding of fashion arithmetic: at last year's Euros it was Admiral x Spice Girls, now it's the Rolling Stones x England Cricket x Castore. These are powerful equations, as when a 2025 Bohemian FC x Fontaines DC shirt (raised to the power of Greta Thunberg when she wore it on her flotilla to Gaza) = £££££ for charity. Maybe Ed Sheeran's Mathematics tour top for Ipswich was an omen. Or perhaps this is a fad, and the music industry will soon move on. GQ, which has declared "blokecore" over, says we'll be wearing classic rugby tops by autumn/winter. Sounds delightfully 90s to me.

Sweet dreams are made of this
Fresh ideas for summer fruit

Feast

Issue No.446 Saturday 8 August 2026

Meera Sodha
Apple cake

Ravinder Bhogal
Pork chops and gooseberry salad

José Pizarro
Peach and moscatel granita

Kirk Haworth
Tomato tarte tatin

Helen Goh
Giant shortcake, summer fruits

Felicity Cloake
Apricot galette

Georgina Hayden
Chicken, plums and pancakes

Rachel Roddy
Figs, raspberry cream and biscuits

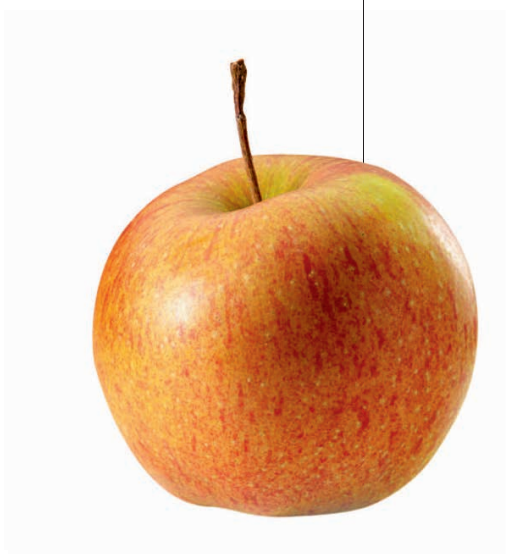
Kitchen aide
Fruit salad fixes

Grace Dent
'I've had glitzier dinners on the M6'

The Guardian

Meera Sodha

For better or for worse (definitely for worse), this column is one-way. If we could talk, I'd ask you about the most mindblowing things you've eaten in your wild and precious life. This year, for me, it was chef Lili's apple cake at her restaurant, Limmat in Marseille. I've never had anything like it: a cake of pure apple – 1.5 kilos – sliced and bound together with a breath of flour, a trickle of cream, a spoonful of sugar, a couple of eggs and a lot of time (in the oven). The result is a caramelised edge but a wonderfully scoopable, custard-like apple centre. Heavenly.



Limmat's apple cake

V

Prep	**15 min**
Cook	**2 hr**
Chill	**4 hr+**
Makes	**1 x 23cm cake**

1½kg braeburn apples (about 12), peeled, cored and halved
2 large eggs
100ml double cream
130g soft light brown sugar
¾ tsp baking powder
75g plain flour
Creme fraiche, or more double cream, to serve

Feast app

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You'll need a 23cm springform tin and a food processor with a 2mm slicing disc to slice the apples thinly enough. Alternatively, you can do this by hand with a mandoline or knife, but you'll need to take your time to make sure the apples are thin enough.

Heat the oven to 180C (160C fan)/gas 4, and line a 23cm springform cake tin with baking paper, making sure there are no gaps for liquid to escape through later.

Using a food processor with a slicing disc, finely slice the apples into 2mm-thick half-moons, then layer them horizontally into the cake tin, making sure there are no big gaps and pressing down each layer as you go.

Break the eggs into a large bowl, add the double cream and sugar, and whisk well. Evenly sprinkle the baking powder and flour on top and whisk again. Slowly pour this batter over the sliced apples, then give the tin a gentle shimmy so it fills any gaps in the apples, if need be.

Bake for an hour and 40 minutes (if required, turn the tin around in the oven halfway through), until it's evenly golden brown on top and there are lots of browned apple slices on top. Remove the cake tin from the oven, leave to cool to room temperature, then chill in the fridge for at least four hours, or overnight.

Unmould the cake from the tin, peel off and discard the paper and put on a serving plate. Slice with a sharp knife and serve with big spoonfuls of creme fraiche alongside.

PHOTOGRAPH: LOUISE HAGGER/THE GUARDIAN. FOOD STYLING: EMILY KYDD.
PROP STYLING: JENNIFER KAY. FOOD STYLING ASSISTANT: ISOBEL CLARKE. INSET: ALAMY

Georgina Hayden
Quick and easy

I have a real aversion to the term 'fakeaway'. I don't know why. But as much as I resist the terminology, I guess it's exactly what this dish is – it's 100% based on and inspired by the Chinese takeaway classic, crispy duck pancakes. Making this with pan-fried chicken takes next to no time and is the perfect after-school/work quick dinner. And for a different ending, I sometimes serve the chicken and plum sauce over jasmine rice instead. With the same accompaniments, of course.

Spiced sticky chicken, plums and pancakes

DF

Prep	**10 min**
Cook	**35 min**
Serves	**4**

2 skinless chicken breasts, around 150g each
Sea salt
1 tsp freshly ground white pepper
1½ tsp Chinese five spice
Groundnut oil
10cm piece ginger, peeled and finely chopped
3 plums, halved, stones removed and discarded, flesh roughly chopped
2 star anise
3 tbsp soft dark brown sugar
1 tbsp rice vinegar
2 tbsp soy sauce
1 bunch spring onions, trimmed and sliced into 5cm strips
½ cucumber, trimmed and cut into matchsticks
12 Chinese-style pancakes

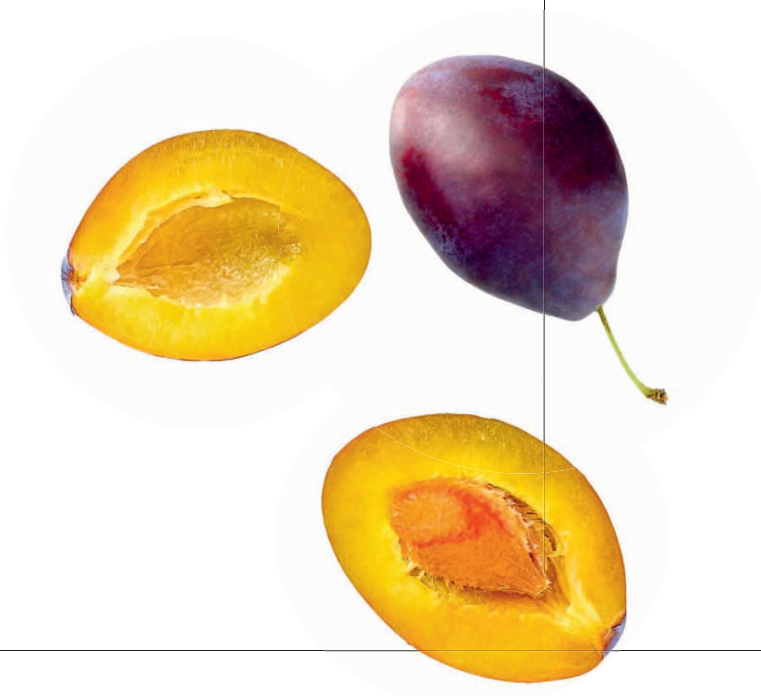
Put the chicken breasts into a bowl and add some sea salt, the white pepper and Chinese five spice. Add a drizzle of groundnut oil and toss everything together.

Put a medium frying pan on a medium-high heat and add a little more oil. Lay in the chicken breasts, scraping any of the marinade from the bowl on to the meat too, and cook for around eight minutes, until the chicken is charred. Flip the meat over and continue to cook for six to eight minutes, until cooked through and gnarly. Transfer the chicken to a plate to rest.

Meanwhile, wipe the pan clean and put it back on the hob over a medium heat. Add two tablespoons of groundnut oil and the chopped ginger, and fry for a minute. Add the chopped plums, star anise and four tablespoons of water, then bring to a boil and soften the fruit for a couple of minutes.

Add the sugar, rice vinegar and soy sauce, stir well, then bring to a simmer. Leave to bubble and soften for a further five to 10 minutes, until the sauce is sticky and rich, adding a splash more water if the sauce is thickening but the plums haven't softened enough.

When the sauce is ready, slice and shred the chicken. Transfer to a platter with the sliced spring onions, cucumber and a bowl of the sauce on the side. Warm the pancakes and serve.



PHOTOGRAPH: MATTHEW HAGUE/THE GUARDIAN. FOOD AND PROP STYLING: FLORENCE BLAIR. FOOD STYLING ASSISTANT: PHOEBE ALTMAN. INSET: GETTY IMAGES

Kirk Haworth
Red alert

August is peak tomato season. This versatile fruit can be put to just about any use, from raw to slow-cooked and from oven- or sun-dried to desserts (believe it or not, they go really well with summer berries – especially strawberries and raspberries). Not only that, but tomatoes have high glutamate levels that rise further as they ripen, which gives them an umami kick. However you prepare them, though, the key thing is *never* to keep tomatoes in the fridge: the chill breaks down their cell structure and affects their flavour alarmingly.

Tomato tarte tatin

V VG DF

Prep	**10 min**
Cook	**45 min**
Serves	**4**

500g cherry tomatoes
20ml balsamic vinegar
60ml extra-virgin olive oil
10g maple syrup
Flaky sea salt
Flour, for dusting
250g vegan puff pastry
15g harissa
10ml lemon juice
½ tsp dijon mustard
100g mixed salad leaves
Basil leaves

Heat the oven to 200C (180C fan)/gas 6, and put the whole cherry tomatoes in a large bowl. In a small bowl, whisk the balsamic vinegar with 30ml of the oil, the maple syrup and a good pinch of salt, then pour over the tomatoes and toss to coat.

Dust a work surface with flour, then roll out the pastry to a 30cm circle. Leaving a border all around the edge, spread out the harissa in a 24cm circle over the centre of the pastry.

Spoon the tomatoes and their dressing into a 24cm oven-safe frying pan, lay the pastry harissa-side down on top, then tuck it in all around the edge of the tomatoes. Bake for half an hour, until the pastry is cooked through and golden.

Once the pastry's cooked, remove the pan and leave it to cool for a few minutes. Meanwhile, make a dressing by whisking 30ml extra-virgin oil with the lemon juice and mustard.

To serve, carefully invert the tarte tatin on to a large plate or board. Dress the salad leaves and basil lightly, season with salt, and serve alongside.

PHOTOGRAPHS: MATTHEW HAGUE/THE GUARDIAN. FOOD AND PROP STYLING: FLORENCE BLAIR. FOOD STYLING ASSISTANT: PHOEBE ALTMAN

Peach, tomato and almond 'ricotta' salad

V VG GF DF

Prep	**10 min**
Soak	**4 hr+**
Cook	**30 min**
Chill	**2 hr+**
Serves	**4**

For the almond 'ricotta'

200g blanched almonds, soaked for at least 4 hours and up to overnight
30ml lemon juice, plus extra to taste
Salt

For the salad

4 ripe peaches
Neutral oil, for grilling
Extra-virgin olive oil
Flaky sea salt
50g blanched almonds
300g mixed tomatoes
1 tbsp sherry vinegar
1 tbsp lemon juice
Basil leaves, to finish

Drain and rinse the soaked almonds, put them in a blender with 600ml cold water and blend smooth. Fine strain through muslin (or your thinnest tea towel at a pinch!), and really squeeze out as much liquid as you can. Pour the resulting nut milk into a saucepan, put on a medium heat and slowly bring up to 85C, stirring now and then. Once the milk is up to temperature, take the pan off the heat, stir in the lemon juice and leave to cool. Once cooled, strain the milk through a muslin-lined sieve into a bowl or container, cover and chill for at least two hours, and preferably overnight to separate into curds and whey. Taste the almond ricotta and season with salt and a squeeze of lemon juice to taste.

Light the barbecue or put a griddle pan on a high heat. Halve the peaches, remove the stones, then cut each half in half again and brush the cut sides with neutral oil. Grill the peaches flesh side down, flipping as necessary until all the flesh sides are nicely charred and slightly softened, then brush the flesh with extra-virgin olive oil and season with a pinch of sea salt.

Heat the oven to 180C (160C fan)/gas 4, put the blanched almonds on a baking tray and roast for 10 minutes, giving them a shake halfway through. Remove, leave to cool, then roughly chop.

Cut the tomatoes into bite-size pieces if need be, and put in a large bowl. In a small bowl, whisk the sherry vinegar, lemon juice and a tablespoon of olive oil until emulsified, then pour the dressing over the tomatoes.

To serve, dot spoonfuls of almond ricotta on four plates; arrange the peaches and tomatoes in between. Tear the basil over the top, scatter on the almonds and serve.

Kirk Haworth is chef/owner of Plates, London EC1

Deli-style chilli, chicken and parm meatball sandwiches

New Guardian Food show **FEED with Jimi Famurewa** travels the UK in search of its favourite food trends. This epic ciabatta melt is Jimi's ode to the American-Italian sub

Prep **10 min**
Cook **15 min**
Serves **4**

500g Sainsbury's British 6% fat chicken mince
50g panko breadcrumbs
3 tsp Sainsbury's Italian herb seasoning
100g Sainsbury's Taste the Difference parmigiano reggiano cheese, grated
1-2 tsp chilli flakes (optional)
Olive oil
2 x 340g Sainsbury's Taste the Difference Calabrian chilli and fennel pasta sauce
2 x 400g Sainsbury's Taste the Difference ciabattas
80g unsalted butter, softened
2 cloves Sainsbury's Taste the Difference smoked garlic, peeled and finely chopped
2 x 125g Sainsbury's Taste the Difference buffalo mozzarella, drained
½ Sainsbury's Taste the Difference sweet romaine lettuce, finely shredded

This recipe combines the influence of an enjoyably fiery Calabrian chilli chicken parm sandwich I had at Bada Bing in Manchester and the meatball sub I enjoyed at Belly of the Beast in Newcastle.

The key adaptations here are the flattening of the meatballs to sit snugly in the ciabatta; the smoked garlic butter that gives you a garlic bread lid; and the Jersey Shore deli-style combination of Sainsbury's Taste the Difference Calabrian chilli and fennel pasta sauce with grilled mozzarella. Don't skip the shredded lettuce as it adds much-needed freshness and texture.

In a large mixing bowl, add the chicken mince, panko breadcrumbs, two teaspoons of Italian herb seasoning, half of the grated parmigiano reggiano, chilli flakes if using and a pinch of salt and pepper. Mix until well combined, shape into 16 small balls then press down so they're puck shaped.

Heat a large wide-based pan over medium high heat with a generous drizzle of olive oil. Once hot, add the chicken meatballs and cook for 8-10 minutes or until golden all over and cooked through. Once cooked, stir in the pasta sauce and remove from the heat.

Halve the ciabattas horizontally, then place all four pieces, cut-side up, on to a baking tray. Heat your grill to medium.

Mix together the softened butter with the chopped garlic, one teaspoon of olive oil and the remaining teaspoon of Italian herb seasoning. Spread this butter on the cut sides of the two sandwich tops.

Evenly spread the meatballs and sauce across the two bases. Top generously with torn mozzarella and the remaining parmigiano reggiano.

Keeping the sandwiches open, grill for 3-4 minutes or until the cheese has melted and the garlic butter has browned.

Carefully remove the open sandwiches from the grill then leave to cool for 1 minute. Sprinkle the meatballs with some of the shredded lettuce then close the sandwiches up, halve and enjoy!

WATCH

Jimi make this recipe in FEED with Jimi Famurewa. Out now on YouTube and the Guardian

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Sainsbury's taste THE DIFFERENCE

PHOTOGRAPHER: YUKI SUGIURA; FOOD STYLIST AND RECIPE DEVELOPER: SONALI SHAH; PROP STYLIST: DAVINA MAJI; PORTRAIT: PAUL REICH

José Pizarro
Everything's peachy

For me, the best desserts are often the simplest. In Spain we often finish a meal with something light, something that refreshes rather than fills you up. This is exactly that. It has a lovely texture that sits somewhere between a drink and something you eat – perfect at the end of a long meal. It feels relaxed but still special, the kind of thing you enjoy slowly, especially on a warm day.

PHOTOGRAPH: OLA O SMIT/THE GUARDIAN. FOOD STYLING: AYA NISHIMURA. PROP STYLING: POLLY WEBB-WILSON. FOOD STYLING ASSISTANT: LAURA LAWRENCE

Peach and moscatel granita

V VG GF DF

Prep	**5 min**
Cook	**40 min plus chilling**
Freeze	**3 hr+**
Serves	**6**

500ml moscatel wine
125g caster sugar
5-6 lemon thyme sprigs
Pared zest of 1 unwaxed lemon, and juice of half
6 ripe peaches or nectarines

Put the wine and sugar in a pan with the lemon thyme and lemon zest and heat gently until the sugar has dissolved. Add 500ml water and bring to a simmer.

Lower the peaches into the liquid and poach for four to five minutes, until they are tender. Remove from the pan with a slotted spoon and leave to cool on a plate or tray. Once cool enough to handle, remove the skins from the peaches and add them to the pan with the poaching liquid. Set the peeled peaches aside to chill in the fridge.

Increase the heat and bubble the poaching liquid for 15-20 minutes, until it has reduced slightly and is a lovely pink colour.

Strain, pressing the juice from the skins, into a jug, and stir in the lemon juice. You want about 700ml of syrup. Set aside to cool, then chill in the fridge until cold.

Pour the chilled syrup into a shallow tray and chill in the freezer for 30 minutes, then stir with a fork, repeat, stirring every half an hour or so. You will need to do this five or six times, until you have a lovely granita.

Serve scoops of granita with a whole poached peach, or cut the fruit in half and remove the stones.

Ravinder Bhogal
A good day for gooseberries

In the summer glut of saccharine fruits like strawberries and peaches, gooseberries may not be the ones you reach for first. But behind their strange burr of fine fuzz, these translucent, marble-like fruits offer a complex, defiant flavour. They are juicy, fragrant, a little sweet (especially the red ones that come along later in the season) but overall, raspishly sour. Like rhubarb, they need sweetening for compotes or desserts, but their natural tartness cuts through cheese, fatty meat like pork or oily fish like mackerel.

Gooseberry tarte tatin with goat's cheese

V

Prep	**10 min**
Cook	**55 min**
Serves	**6**

40g butter
A few sprigs of thyme
2½ tbsp runny honey
3 tbsp apple cider vinegar
Sea salt and black pepper
750g gooseberries, topped and tailed
Plain flour, for dusting
500g block puff pastry
150g soft goat's cheese

A savoury take on the classic apple tarte tatin. This version features a wonderful partnership between tart gooseberries and funky goat's cheese. Serve with some dressed salad leaves and toasted hazelnuts for crunch.

Heat the oven to 200C (180C fan)/ gas 6. Put a 20cm ovenproof frying pan over a medium heat and melt the butter. Once the butter has completely melted, add the thyme and fry briefly for 30 seconds, then stir in the honey and vinegar and season well.

Once the glaze has thickened and caramelised, remove the pan from the heat and leave to cool for eight to 10 minutes. Add the gooseberries and stir to coat.

On a floured work surface, roll out the pastry to 3mm thick, then cut out a circle slightly larger than the pan. Cover the gooseberries with the pastry, using your fingers to carefully tuck it in at the edges. Bake for 30-35 minutes, or until crisp and golden on top.

Remove from the oven and leave to cool for at least five minutes before carefully inverting on to a serving plate. Serve hot or cold, scattered with crumbled goat's cheese and more black pepper.

Spiced pork chops with herbs and gooseberry salad

PHOTOGRAPHS: BECA B JONES/THE GUARDIAN. FOOD STYLING: HANNA MILLER. PROP STYLING: AYA NISHIMURA. FOOD STYLING ASSISTANT: ISOBEL CLARKE

GF

Prep	**15 min**
Marinate	**20 min**
Pickle	**10 min**
Cook	**30 min**
Serves	**4**

2 tsp sea salt
2 tsp fennel seeds
2 tbsp coriander seeds
1 tsp black peppercorns
1 tsp caster sugar
½ tsp paprika
1 tsp dried oregano
4 pork chops
2 tbsp olive oil
25g butter
4 garlic cloves, unpeeled, bashed until flat

For the salad
3 tbsp white-wine vinegar
1 tbsp caster sugar, or honey
Sea salt and black pepper
1 tsp coriander seeds, toasted and very lightly crushed
2 fennel bulbs, trimmed and very finely sliced from top to base (preferably with a mandoline)
1 cucumber, peeled and sliced into long ribbons with a vegetable peeler or mandoline
1 banana shallot, peeled and very finely sliced
200g gooseberries
25g tarragon, leaves picked
25g mint, picked and finely chopped
3 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil

Put the salt, fennel seeds, coriander seeds, pepper and sugar into a mortar and grind to a fine powder. Add the paprika and oregano and grind again. Pat the chops dry with kitchen paper, then press the spice mix all over the meat. Leave to marinate at room temperature for 20 minutes.

Heat the oven to 200C (180C fan)/gas 6. Heat the oil and butter in an ovenproof frying pan on a medium heat and add the garlic. Using tongs, hold the chops skin side down in the pan for five minutes to crisp up and render the fat. Once the fat is a lovely amber colour, fry the chops for three minutes on each side, basting as you go, then transfer to the oven for six minutes, or until cooked all the way through. Rest the meat for five minutes.

Meanwhile, make the salad. Mix the vinegar and caster sugar in a mixing bowl until the sugar has dissolved, then season well with salt and pepper. Add the coriander seeds, fennel, cucumber and shallot, and set aside to lightly pickle for 10 minutes. Finally, add the gooseberries and herbs to the fennel mix and drizzle over the olive oil. Toss well and serve with the pork chops.

Felicity Cloake
The perfect … apricot galette

The galette takes its name from the pebble it's said to resemble – as Elizabeth David observes, it takes many forms, all of them round and flat. In this instance, though, we're not talking the Breton buckwheat pancake, nor the puff-pastry Epiphany pie, but a free-form fruit tart that's easy to throw together with whatever seasonal fruit you have to hand.

The pastry

As Louis Thompson observes on Nicola Lamb's Kitchen Project newsletter, "because you are eating such a small amount of pastry per portion in a galette, it can afford to be richer." I've gone for a rich flaky pastry, based on the version in Helen Goh and Yotam Ottolenghi's book Sweet, but swapping in some of the wholemeal flour used by Brian Levy for a more interesting flavour.

The fruit

Having tried recipes using rhubarb, blueberry, peach and apple, I conclude the drier the fruit, the more impressive looking the results … but juicier fruits taste better. Whatever you go for, cut drier fruits like apples into thin slices and keep stone fruits chunkier, to minimise juice loss to the base.

On which note, pastry chef Sarah Johnson, author of Fruitful tells Thompson: "I like to put the galette in the oven without sugar, then gradually add it as it cooks. This helps preserve the fruit's shape and prevents excess liquid from escaping."

The sponge

Nicole Rucker and Rose Levy Beranbaum, both of whom macerate their fruit before use, stick it straight on to the pastry base, while, like Chez Panisse, Goh and Ottolenghi use crushed amaretti biscuits mixed with sugar and flour to soak up excess juices. Levy's book Good & Sweet opts for an apricot puree, but our favourite is Thompson's frangipane, which works brilliantly, and tastes great too.

1 Pulse chilled flour, salt, baking powder and cream cheese in a processor, then add the butter

2 Pulse the butter to coarse crumbs, and add enough iced water to make a dough. Flatten, wrap and chill

3 Blitz most of the baked almonds to a fine powder. Mix with sugar, flour, butter, salt and egg to a paste

4 Roll out the dough to a rough circle on a baking sheet, and chill while you halve and stone the apricots

Perfect apricot galette

To make the pastry, freeze the butter for at least an hour, until solid. Measure the flours, salt and baking powder into a bowl and freeze them, too.

Pulse the flours and cheese in a food processor to combine, then add the butter. Pulse again until the mixture looks like coarse breadcrumbs with some larger chunks of butter. Alternatively, use your fingertips to flatten the pieces.

Add just enough iced water (probably two tablespoons) that it forms a dough when you squidge it. Tip on to a work surface, press into a ball, then flatten. Wrap and chill for at least 45 minutes.

Meanwhile, heat the oven to 200C (180C fan)/gas 6. Bake the almonds for 12 minutes, leave to cool, then roughly chop. Set aside 10g, blitz the rest to a fine powder, then mix in the sugar, flour, butter, salt and just enough egg to make a spreadable paste, keeping the remainder.

Roll out the dough on a large, floured piece of baking paper to a rough circle about 32cm across. Carefully transfer to a baking sheet and chill while you halve and stone the apricots.

Trim the pastry, just to neaten the edge, then use a plate or lid about 25cm wide to score a circle in the middle, being careful not to cut all the way through.

Spread the circle with the frangipane filling, then scatter with the cornflour and one tablespoon of the sugar. Finally, arrange the apricot halves across the tart, skin-side up, cutting the last pieces to fill any gaps.

V

Prep	**50 min**
Chill	**1 hr 15 min**
Freeze	**1 hr**
Cook	**45 min**
Serves	**8**

For the pastry:
125g cold butter, cut into 2cm cubes
120g plain flour, plus extra to dust
60g wholemeal plain flour
¼ tsp fine salt
⅛ tsp baking powder
80g full-fat cream cheese

For the filling (or use 50g crumbled amaretti mixed with the same amount of flour and sugar):
100g skin-on almonds
50g caster sugar
20g plain flour
30g butter, softened
A pinch of salt
1 egg, beaten

For the topping
650g apricots or other stone fruit
1 tbsp cornflour
2 tbsp caster sugar
2 tbsp smooth apricot or other jam

Fold the rim of the pastry towards the centre all the way around - there should be a circle of fruit still exposed in the middle. If your kitchen is warm, put back in the fridge for 30 minutes. Heat the oven and a baking sheet back up to 200C (180C fan)/gas 6.

Brush the pastry with the remaining beaten egg. Slide the paper and tart on to the hot baking sheet and bake for 15 minutes, then scatter the fruit with the remaining sugar. Put back in the oven for 30 minutes, or until golden, turning halfway if it's colouring unevenly. Slide off the paper on to a wire rack to cool.

Heat the jam until runny. Once the tart has cooled slightly, paint the fruit and pastry with jam and scatter with the reserved chopped nuts.

PHOTOGRAPHS: ROBERT BILLINGTON/THE GUARDIAN. FOOD STYLING: JOHNNY BENTHAM

5 Use a 25cm plate or lid to mark a circle in the dough, and cover the circle with frangipane

6 Dust with cornflour and sugar, cover with apricots, fold in the pastry rim and brush with egg

7 Bake for 15 minutes, dust with sugar, and bake for 30 minutes more. Cool, then finish with hot jam and nuts

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Mina Holland

‘Berries with a hint of tarmac’? How to describe ‘fruity’ wine

“Strawberries, cherries and an angel’s kiss in spring,” sang Nancy Sinatra. “My summer wine is really made from all these things …” Overlook the angel’s kiss and, if you’re a wine drinker, you might recognise some of those fruity tasting notes – strawberries and cherries, indeed, but also citrus, orchard, other stone fruits and the whole berry family. In fact, it’s common to liken a wine to almost any fruit … except grapes.

A wine can have notes of almost anything – pencil shavings, tennis balls, cat pee – but fruit is most obvious (clearly, wine is made from fruit). If I told you I was getting, say, green apple and lime zest from a riesling, you would probably have a good sense of what that meant, and what you might be able to expect on tasting it yourself. If I described a petroleum aroma, that might sound a bit cryptic and much less appealing, unless you were familiar with this tasting note commonly found in riesling. In other words, a wine’s fruit profile is often leveraged as a marketing tool. What better example of this than the “strawberries and cream” of Provence rosé? It’s a tasting note that underpins our collective sense that rosé is a summer drop, perfect for sun-drenched days filled with watching tennis, ocean views and seasonal produce.

But fruit notes in wine are very much a real thing. When we talk about a wine having notes of tart cherry or candied orange, we’re describing what we find in its aroma – smell being, of course, a factor in how we taste. Wines contain aromatic compounds that are similar to those found in other fruits – for example, esters (made by yeasts during fermentation, bringing notes of banana, pear, pineapple), or compounds originating in grapes, including thiols (tropical fruit), norisoprenoids (dried fruit and honeyed notes) and terpenes (citrus and floral aromas).

To deconstruct a wine in this way can feel pedantic – a wine is so much more than a collection of aromatic compounds, after all. Something of its magic lies in the time or place in which you drink it, or the people with whom you do so – but today’s picks showcase some of the different fruit aromas you might find in grapes, styles and regions, from the apricots and orange blossom of the moscatel and torrontes blend from southern Chile to a simple, peachy Roussillon orange, to the damsons and dark cherries of a Georgian saperavi. Your summer wine really can have aromas of all these things.

Four fruity little numbers to splash out on

Pipeño Blanco 2024, A Los Vinateros Bravos £21 Monty Wines, 12.5%. Apricot, peach and citrus peel in this Chilean white

W/O Organic Nero d’Avola Rosato 2024 £14.99 Laithwaites, 12%. All the summer berries in this volcanic Sicilian rosé

Cote Mas Orange £10.25 Waitrose, 13%. Any orange notes in this orange wine are zesty, peachy and a little cooked

M&S Found Saperavi £12 Ocado, 13%. Saperavi means ‘dyed’ – skins bring deep colour and grippy, dark red fruit aromas

The good mixer

Peaches & Cream

A frozen drink and a classic dessert all rolled into one. Instead of piña coladas and getting caught in the rain, we’re whipping up these and manifesting a sunny summer.

Serves **1**

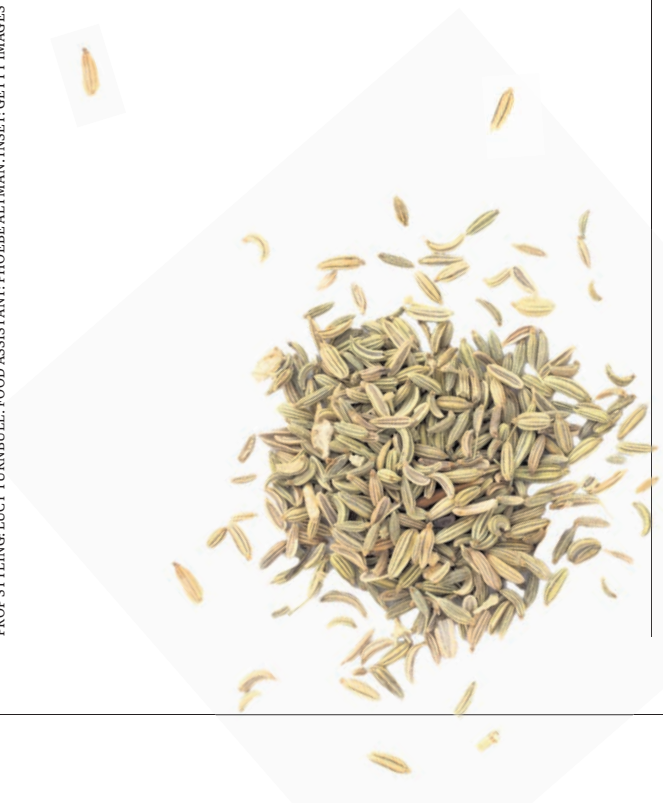
50ml spiced dark rum – we use Diplomático Riserva Exclusiva
1 small handful frozen peach slices – 5-7 pieces, plus 1 slice to garnish
3 tbsp coconut cream
30ml peach juice, or any sweet fruit juice
15ml fresh lime juice

Put everything into a blender and blitz for 30-60 seconds, until very smooth. Pour into a highball glass, garnish with the extra slice of frozen peach and serve.
Jayma Voorheis, general manager, Half Cut Market, London N7

PHOTOGRAPH: ROB LAWSON/THE GUARDIAN. DRINKS STYLING: SEB DAVIS

Helen Goh
The sweet spot

A giant American-style shortcake is one of summer's great celebrations: tender, buttery shortcake, softly whipped cream and an extravagant tumble of fruit. Rather than prescribing a single combination, I like to let the market decide. Choose whatever looks and smells best: strawberries, raspberries, blackberries, blueberries, greengages, apricots, cherries, nectarines or peaches all work beautifully. Aim for a mix of juicy stone fruit and berries – it will bring different colours, textures and levels of sweetness to every bite.



PHOTOGRAPH (INCLUDING COVER): MATTHEW HAGUE/THE GUARDIAN. FOOD STYLING: KATIE SMITH. PROP STYLING: LUCY TURNBULL. FOOD ASSISTANT: PHOEBE ALTMAN. INSET: GETTY IMAGES

Giant shortcake, summer fruits and vanilla cream

V

Prep	**15 min**
Chill	**1 hr+**
Cook	**1 hr 20 min, plus cooling**
Serves	**8-10**

For the shortcake
380g plain flour, plus extra for dusting
70g caster sugar, plus 1 tbsp extra
3 tsp baking powder
½ tsp fine sea salt
150g cold unsalted butter
250ml cold double cream, plus 1 tbsp extra for brushing
1 tsp vanilla extract
1 tsp fennel seeds, lightly toasted and crushed
A few small mint leaves, to garnish

For the fruit
350g stone fruit of choice, stoned and sliced into 5-7mm wedges
350g berries of choice, halve or quarter strawberries, depending on size
40g caster sugar, plus extra depending on the sweetness of the fruit
2 tsp lemon juice
A pinch of fine salt

For the cream
350ml double cream
20g icing sugar
1 tsp vanilla extract
A pinch of fine salt

Cut a sheet of baking paper to fit a large baking tray, then using a 20cm cake tin or plate as a guide, draw a 20cm circle on it.

Whisk the flour, caster sugar, baking powder and salt in a medium bowl to combine.

Put the butter between two sheets of baking paper and give it a few whacks with a rolling pin, until it forms a rough sheet about 5mm thick. Tear the butter into irregular pieces and add to the flour mix, tossing to coat. Rub the butter lightly between your fingertips to flatten into smaller flakes of about 1-2cm across.

Combine the cream and vanilla, then pour into the flour mix. Stir gently with a fork until the mix forms a shaggy dough, then use a flexible spatula to fold it over a few times, until there are no dry patches.

Turn the dough out on to a lightly floured work surface, then flour your hands and gently pat and press the dough into a rough disc. Transfer to the baking paper, placing it on the side without the circle. Using the drawn circle as a guide, gently press the dough into an even 20cm round, about 2cm thick. Wrap the dough in the baking paper and chill for at least an hour, or up to three hours.

To bake, heat the oven to 200C (180C fan)/gas 6. Unwrap the dough, put it (still on the baking paper) on to a large baking tray and brush with the remaining tablespoon of cream. Mix the crushed fennel seeds with the extra tablespoon of caster sugar and sprinkle over the top.

Bake for 30 minutes, then reduce the oven to 190C (170C fan)/gas 5 and bake for a further 15 minutes, until deeply golden. Transfer to a wire rack to cool completely.

About 30 minutes before serving, combine the fruits, sugar, lemon juice and salt in a bowl. Toss gently and leave to macerate until the fruit has released some of its juices.

Meanwhile, whip the cream with the icing sugar, vanilla and salt until it holds soft peaks.

Put the shortcake on a serving plate. Using a serrated knife, slice horizontally to lift off the central crusty-domed cap (about 1cm in thickness). Don't worry if it cracks into a few pieces – reserve on a plate for serving. Spoon the whipped cream over the shortcake and pile most of the fruit on top, along with a little of the juices. Finish with mint leaves.

To serve, cut the shortcake into wedges and transfer to plates. Spoon over the extra fruit and juices, then tuck pieces of the crisp fennel-sugar top alongside each serving.

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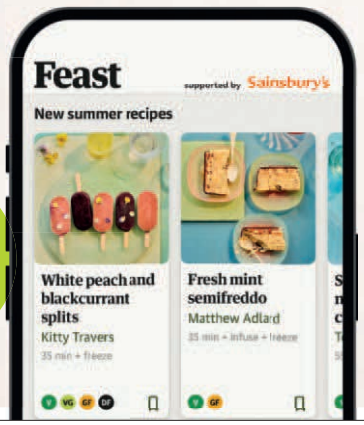

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Tom Hunt
The filter: cottage cheese

When I was growing up, cottage cheese was tasteless and mostly only eaten by dieters. Its recent revival has similar health reasons at its root – the current protein obsession, gym bros and weight watchers alike – but cottage cheese has become cool. The flavourless squeaky varieties of yesteryear still exist, but there's also a whole new category on shelves that is unabashedly fatty, rich and full of flavour.

Texture is also a key factor. I find tough, squeaky curds unappetising but I do enjoy them with a bit of size, and the silkier the better. It's rare I give five out of five, especially when a product is not organic, but there was one today that was so good it deserved the award.

As usual, points were also given for transparency and provenance, plus sustainability certification – and, importantly, value.

Best overall

The Estate Dairy Cottage Cheese Made with Jersey Milk
£3.60 (450g), Ocado
★★★★★
A wonderfully rich, unctuous and creamy cottage cheese made with live cultures, and the milk *and* cream of Jersey cows on the Cholmondeley Estate in Cheshire. Dense, with large, firm and plentiful curds. Protein: 10%. B-Corp.

Co-op High Protein Cottage Cheese
£2.10 (300g), Co-op
★★★★☆
An extra-thick cottage cheese with small to large curds. Very creamy and stiff, but with lovely soft curds and a fresh taste. Made with British milk and enriched with cream and creme fraiche. Joint highest protein: 12%.

All Things Cottage Cheese Natural
£1.85 (240g), Ocado
★★★★☆
Complex, like a sour mascarpone. A thick, creamy texture with large, soft curds suspended in the cream. Made with British grass-fed milk, cream, pink Himalayan salt and lactic cultures, which give it a lipsmackingly sour twang. Protein: 10%.

Graham's The Family Dairy Cottage Cheese Natural
£1.65 (300g), Tesco
★★★☆☆
Extra sweet and very firm curds of mixed sizes, which make up a thick creamy sauce. A classic, sharp, sour twang. Made from just Scottish milk and salt. Joint highest protein content at 12%.

Best bargain

Asda Cottage Cheese
£1.58 (300g), Asda
★★★☆☆
Very creamy, extra-large, super-soft curds. Made with British milk and salt. Wonderfully silky and soft with a rich, creamy quality and classic sour edge. Protein: 9.1%.

Milbona Cottage Cheese Natural
£1.39 (300g), Lidl
★★★☆☆
A dense, fresh and creamy cottage cheese with small, soft curds and a layer of cream sitting on top. This one has a lovely, clean, lactic sour taste. Made simply with milk and salt. 11.5% protein. Produced in the EU.

Essential Waitrose & Partners Natural Cottage Cheese
£1.75 (300g), Waitrose
★★★★☆
An excellent and consistently thick and creamy cottage cheese with large, silky curds. Sweet, rich and sour. Made with just British milk and salt. Protein: 10.3%.

Piątnica Serek Wiejski Cottage Cheese Natural
£1.20 (200g), Sainsbury's
★★★☆☆
Very firm medium- to large-size curds, suspended in a sweet and very mild cream. A less sour flavour than most, with a clean, fresh milk flavour. Protein: 11%.

Longley Farm Yorkshire Cottage Cheese
£1.85 (250g), Tesco
★★★★☆
Large, very firm curds with a thick layer of cream on top. Made in Yorkshire by Longley Farm since 1948 from just milk and salt. Despite only being made from milk, this one has a high fat content, making it rich and creamy. Protein content: 10.3%.

Emporium Full Fat Plain Cottage Cheese
£1.39 (300g), Aldi
★★☆☆☆
Medium-size, firm curds suspended in cream and creme fraiche. Even though this product has a light, fresh taste and yoghurt-like consistency, it has a complex and sour flavour. Protein: 11.9%.

PHOTOGRAPH AND FOOD STYLING: ROBERT BILLINGTON/THE GUARDIAN

Kitchen aide

Texture, spice, colour: how to jazz up a fruit salad

How can I make fruit salads more interesting?
Claire, via email

There's a fine line between a boring and brilliant fruit salad, and it comes down to treating it like you would any other salad. "It's about layering, it's about texture, it's about contrast, it's about colour," says Gurdeep Loyal, author of Flavour Heroes. That's not to say it's the time to be a maximalist, mind. "If you go for six fruits, then you get into the tinned fruit cocktail territory, so be discerning and use a magic triad instead," he adds – "although don't feel the need to use a playground mix of colours". Sometimes it's nice to have, say, three red things, so keep it in the family with a mix of strawberries, raspberries and a hybrid berry, like tayberries. That said, Loyal is of the strong opinion that "any fruit salad in the world" will greatly benefit from the addition of passion fruit.

Using nice, ripe fruit is a given, but it's worth considering how you cut it, too – "a persimmon sliced on a mandoline, for example, is a really lovely thing". Then, season with salt. "It's the one thing people don't do enough," Loyal adds, although a pinch of brown sugar wouldn't go amiss, either. And it's hard to deny the transformative power of spices: "Cinnamon works incredibly well with berries; cardamom with tropical fruit; or try more savoury spices like cumin with mango or pineapple." It would be a mistake to just stick to the spice rack, though: "Grating ginger on strawberries or mango (with a pinch of cinnamon and some lime, of course) will bring heat, as will freshly grated turmeric."

Then, there's chilli, either a dusting of dried powder or flecks of the fresh stuff. "One of my favourite ways with watermelon is with a sprinkle of aleppo pepper and grated frozen feta," says Sabrina Ghayour, author of Persiana One, although cantaloupe with pul biber, feta and torn basil is pretty good, too. But for extra oomph, Loyal is partial to hot chilli honey: "Put honey in a pan with finely diced chilli and a pinch of salt, let it infuse for five minutes, then use that to drizzle over mango and strawberries."

Herbs (torn, never cut) are another must: "Basil and tarragon have an amazing ability to amplify flavour," says Loyal, and are just as good with berries as tropical fruit and melon. Otherwise, Ghayour combines coriander with peaches, pineapple or mango (plus, chilli, onion and lime juice) for salsa, to serve alongside grilled meat or seafood.

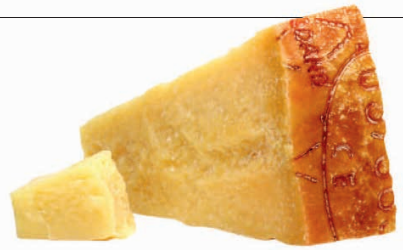
As with any salad, you'll then want a dressing. "This could be citrus and a bit of honey or maple, a drizzle of olive oil, or just the juice at the bottom of the bowl once you've salted it," says Loyal. But, as is so often the case, a tablespoon of alcohol always helps: "Try vodka with lime juice, a little maple syrup, and a pinch of cinnamon."

Last, don't be shy when it comes to texture: Loyal deploys a topping of toasted peanuts or pine nuts, dukkah, or sesame seed brittle for crunch. And make it beautiful. "You don't *need* to add petals," says Loyal – "but also why not?"

Anna Berrill

Got a culinary dilemma?
Email feast@theguardian.com

PHOTOGRAPHS: MATTHEW HAGUE/THE GUARDIAN, GETTY IMAGES



Waste not ...
Parmesan rind
Tom Hunt

Although parmesan rind is tough, it has just as much, if not more flavour than the cheese from inside the wheel itself. It can be used just as it is to flavour stock or *risi e bisi* (Venetian pea risotto), but grating it opens up a whole range of other uses, such as in my mac and cheese "rinds" and today's parmesan rind pesto. The flavour is very powerful, though, so add it to taste: you may find that you need a lot less than you think you do.

Parmesan rind pesto

Toast four tablespoons of pine nuts in a dry pan until golden brown, then tip out and leave to cool. Put a small peeled garlic clove and a pinch of sea salt in a mortar, then grind to a smooth puree. Work in half the pine nuts, crushing them into small pieces (I like to save some to add at the end, for extra texture). Add 75g roughly chopped basil (including the finely chopped stalks) a handful at a time, working quickly to preserve its vivid green colour. Grate in two tablespoons of parmesan rind using a sharp fine grater, mix well using the pestle, then slowly pour in 100-150ml extra-virgin olive oil, grinding the whole time, until the pesto is of a consistency that's to your liking. Finish by stirring in the reserved whole pine nuts and adding more sea salt to taste, if need be. (To make the pesto in a blender, simply pulse-blitz everything bar half the whole pine nuts until smooth but textural.) Serve at once, or keep in a sealed, sterilised container in the fridge for up to two days.

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Rachel Roddy
Tales from an Italian kitchen

Figs with raspberry cream and cat tongue biscuits

In his exquisite The French Menu Cookbook, Richard Olney has clear ideas and strong opinions about everything, including dessert. He believed that rich desserts should follow only the simplest of meals, whereas with most menus (meaning all the sophisticated menus in his book), something light, airy and playful is best.

His suggestions read like a summer fruit poem, and could fill this entire summer fruit special: peach melba, apple mousse with peaches, apricot fritters dusted with icing sugar, strawberries in sweetened orange juice, strawberries in beaujolais, strawberry mousse with raspberry puree, iced cherries and fresh almonds. One of his late summer/early autumn menus also suggests fresh figs with raspberry cream (*figues à la crème framboise*), which is both fun to make (the red puree streaking through the cream for a raspberry ripple) and to eat.

An airy and playful pudding calls for an airy and playful biscuit. What better than *lingue di gatto,* or cat tongues, so called because of their flat, elongated shape. Made from butter, sugar, flour, and egg whites, *lingue di gatto* are not complicated to make, but do require a piping bag, which can be mimicked by a zip-lock bag – just remember to scrape the mixture into the bag first, and only snip the end off when you are ready to pipe.

This recipe is from Italian pastry chef Iginio Massari's Non solo zucchero [Not Only Sugar] Volume 1, an invaluable step-by-step guide to short pastry, sponge cakes, butter masses, creams, cream puffs and meringues aimed at professional pastry chefs, but just as suitable (and revelatory) for enthusiastic but chaotic pastry cooks like me.

An 'airy and playful pudding' like figs with raspberry cream calls for an airy and playful biscuit. What better than *lingue di gatto*?

To make about 30 biscuits, put 50g soft butter and 60g icing sugar in a bowl and use a spatula to mix the two together. Stir in three (unbeaten) egg whites, before adding 60g sifted flour and mixing again. Scrape the mixture into a pastry bag with a smooth 10mm nozzle (or a zip-lock bag you can snip the corner from).

On a baking tray lined with parchment, squeeze out 10cm lines, ensuring you leave 4cm between each one so the biscuits can spread. Top each biscuit with three or four flaked almonds, then bake at 190C (170C fan)/gas 5 for about eight minutes, until the biscuits are golden and tongue-like. Leave to cool a little before lifting on to a cooling rack.

If you don't want to eat them immediately, cat tongues can be stored in an airtight container for two weeks, or frozen (I am always shocked to be reminded what can be frozen) for up to a month.

It is up to you whether you peel the four to six ripe figs – both pale green and dark purple ones are suitable here – before you slice each one into four; chill. Wash 250g raspberries then set half of them aside, and press the rest through a fine sieve for a smooth, bright red puree. Whip 250ml of whipping cream until stiff, then stir in icing sugar to taste – one to two tablespoons. Then, using a metal spoon, fold through the raspberry puree for a mottled raspberry-ripple effect.

There are various ways to serve this pudding. Olney suggests a large serving dish, which, considering his warning never to put tomato dishes on a red plate or those including spinach on a green one, should *not* be pink. Olney arranges the chilled fig slices first, then pours the raspberry cream over the top, which baffles me slightly, because the cream is so thick. An alternative is serving in individual bowls, saucers or glasses: a spoonful of the raspberry cream first, then topping it with a small pile of fruit (figs, the whole raspberries you've set aside, plus redcurrants and mint leaves). The cat tongue biscuits can be stuck in the cream like fairy wings, put on the side of the plate, or passed around the table on a separate plate so everyone can help themselves.

PHOTOGRAPH: RACHEL RODDY/THE GUARDIAN

Grace Dent

'The largely human-free hospitality will either delight or horrify you, but the food is serious'

PHOTOGRAPHS: SHAW & SHAW

Bullgogi, a whopping new interactive multiscreen Korean restaurant in Manchester's Piccadilly Plaza, has arrived, heralding the end of traditional hospitality – again.

It's the UK's largest Korean barbecue restaurant – 165 covers, traditional tabletop grills at every booth – but no servers with notepads; just screens. Your *gyeran jjim*, your *dolsot bibimbap*, your *bulgogi*: jab the at-table screen and it will arrive, ferried by human hand. Think McDonald's, but a gargantuan restaurant.

Jae Cho and his Maguro Group have built an empire of 21 locations across London and Manchester, but this is his biggest venture to date. We arrive without reservation, which is no problem because Bullgogi is the size of a small planet. We order pots of barley tea and pints of Asahi at £6.90 and enjoy the Blade Runner vibes.

Bullgogi's largely human-free hospitality will either delight or horrify you. Personally, I greet our new robot hospitality overlords with calm scepticism. Over the past few decades, I have staggered through the Covid QR menu wilderness, prised my dinner from the temperamental jaws of robot fridges in rural farm shops, and

Bullgogi

6A Piccadilly Plaza, M1 4AH, 0161-553 1141, bullgogi.com. Open all week, noon-10pm (10.30pm Sat, 9.30pm Sun); lunch menu 12pm-4pm Mon-Fri only. About £30 a la carte for two dishes (lunch menu about £13 a head), plus drinks and service.

watched with mirth as the robot chef at a recent Soho yakitori joint still required a human to load every skewer into it before performing.

For these reasons, I greet Bullgogi with a raised eyebrow. In fact, the moment we flag, via the screen, a food intolerance at our table, a bright, chipper human appears immediately to check through the menu for the offending item.

Bullgogi offers a restaurant hoping to serve all palates. Experienced Korean food lovers can head straight for the *doenjang jjigae*, an earthy soya bean paste broth with beef, or the *sundubu jjigae* - silken tofu with seafood.

If you're preparing for war, there is *budae jjigae*, the Korean army stew where spam, ham, kimchi and noodles are simmered into something rib-sticking enough to fuel a march to the 38th parallel.

There is wobbly *gyeran jjim* - steamed egg custard - Korean beef tartare seasoned with sesame oil, and *gimmari* - crispy seaweed rolls stuffed with glass noodles.

For pan-Asian regulars who might know bibimbap and things like double-fired Korean fried chicken or *kimchi pajeon* (fermented kimchi pancake), Bullgogi has that covered too.

You'll see Korean students from Manchester university using it as a canteen alongside tables of pensioners from Rochdale encountering Korean food for the first time. This is a harder trick to pull off than it sounds, and the screen ordering seems to appeal to both.

Bullgogi is not necessarily a place to linger. It is cheap, strip-lit, sparsely decorated - a bold new opening that feels more like a 1990s service station than a restaurant. I've had glitzier dinners at Forton Services; however, there is a sense that food is taken seriously here.

The Korean dumplings arrive too hot to devour immediately, but are crisp and crimped, with a peppery, minced vegetable filling.

Ordering the cheese potato pancake, or *gamja jeon*, was probably an error: no health authority in the world would smile upon me for eating four pieces of deep-fried shredded potato and barrowfuls of melted mozzarella. My lifespan decreased with each mouthful.

Bullgogi' may be 'the size of a small planet', but but the food is taken seriously: take the 'highly decent' chicken bibimbap (above) and the 'crisp and crimped' dumplings (below).

A stone bowl of silken tofu *sundubu jjigae* arrived in a fabulous seafood broth - one of the best things we ate - followed by a chicken *dolsot bibimbap*, which was also highly decent.

We didn't use the tabletop grill, and nor did anyone else. The future of the Korean tabletop grill looks patchy. Restaurateurs quietly admit they are hell to service and expensive to run. Modern customers love the idea of them but don't use them - though if you do, the *bulgogi*, LA *galbi*, iberico collar and spicy pork are waiting.

Bullgogi is a pleasant, amenable, albeit slightly hollow dining experience. We ate, we paid, we left. There were no desserts. No one noted our departure, as seemingly no robot had alerted them that we were a dine and dash.

The drive-thru Costa Coffee-ification of British restaurants continues. Treasure your servers while you have them. You'll miss them when they're gone.

Sainsbury's

Good food for all of us

Serving suggestion. Product availability may vary by store.

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EARLY RISER

How Bella Ramsey shook off child stardom to become an acting powerhouse

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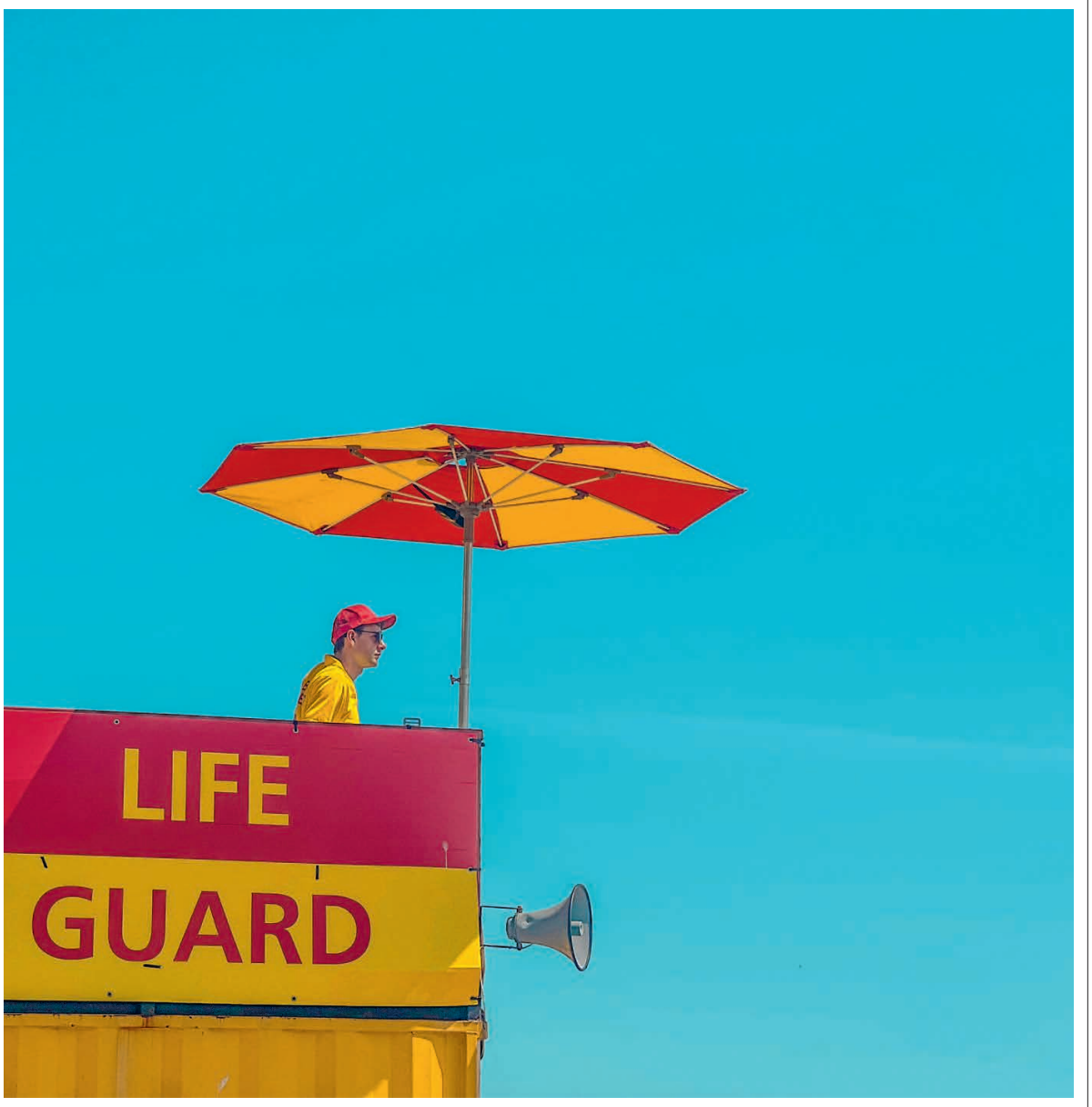

COVER: LINDA BROWNLEE/THE GUARDIAN

Smart shot

The best pictures taken on phones

Bertram Greenhough

Lifeguard, 2023
Shot on iPhone 13 Pro

Bertram Greenhough had promised his six-year-old daughter Audrey an ice-cream. It was a warm June day in Brighton and the pair were playing tourists in their own city, having just visited an upside-down house near the i360 observation tower. The beach was packed, and they were heading in the direction of the Palace Pier so that Greenhough could stay true to his word. Along the way, they passed this lifeguard shelter.

“I often walk around Brighton with my SLR film camera - very hipster of me. However, that day I only had my phone,” Greenhough recalls. “But, as the adage goes, the best camera is the one you have with you. I saw this calm, minimalist scene suspended above thousands of people and I remember saying to my daughter, ‘Oh, look at that, I need to take a picture!’ She had no idea what I was talking about!”

A second later, the lifeguard moved and the composition and harmony had gone. It was, for Greenhough, “a decisive moment”.

Later that evening - Mr Whippy with a flake secured and devoured - he used one of the presets in Lightroom to make some edits. “I tend to use them as a starting point,” he says. “I often find how I see a scene and what the camera actually records can be quite different, so I increased the vibrancy of the yellows and reds, and adjusted the hue of the blue sky to complement the other two colours.

“I hope it gives people a sense of peace and security,” Greenhough adds. “Perhaps, like me, they can feel the warmth of the sun.”
Grace Holliday

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for our Inside Saturday newsletter

Think you can't afford an EV? Think again

Becoming part of the shift to electric has never been easier thanks to a government grant, some useful tax breaks and next-gen cars such as the new CUPRA Raval, writes Christian Koch

Of all the myths surrounding electric vehicles – fears they can't be driven through a car wash, or claims there are no chargers in the deeper Basingstoke area (both untrue by the way) – one of the most enduring is the belief they're too expensive. It's a misconception that's changing, fast.

In April, the average price of an electric vehicle (EV) fell below that of petrol cars in the UK for the first time, with EVs now costing on average £785 less, according to Autotrader.

Although running costs for EVs have been cheaper than their diesel-dependent counterparts for over a decade, the price shift marks another important step in the UK's transition towards net zero.

A raft of newer EVs hitting the market is helping accelerate this shift, among them the Raval from the Spanish carmakers CUPRA, a hatchback that's making EV ownership more accessible thanks to its entry-level pricing and low running costs. Designed, developed and produced in Barcelona, the Raval is inspired by one of the city's most iconic and vibrant neighbourhoods.

"This compact electric hatchback is perfectly suited to first-time drivers and young families looking for a practical second car," says Claire English, head of sales, CUPRA & SEAT UK.

Another gamechanger has been the explosion in popularity of leasing via salary sacrifice. For employees lucky enough to have access to such schemes, leasing this way is generally cheaper than leasing a car personally, particularly if insurance and maintenance are included (as is usually the case). Some providers even chuck in a free charger, too – costs vary, but you could generally expect to pay £800-£1,200 for a charger and its installation by a qualified electrician.

On top of these savings, salary sacrifice schemes even allow for a tax saving. Earners paying the higher or additional rate of tax will make the greatest savings here.

Because there's no such thing as a free lunch, employees will have to pay company car tax in return. (Although this is considerably lower for EVs than petrol or diesel vehicles.)

The government's Electric Car Grant is also helping slash prices for would-be EV switchers. Introduced last year, it offers buyers up to £3,750 off some vehicles.

The CUPRA Raval qualifies for a £1,500 discount, making it perfect for younger drivers and first-time EV owners. And the compact hatchback is as comfortable in urban gridlocks as it is on longer journeys: it offers up to 277 miles of range* (WLTP), alongside eye-catching styling. Its nimble design means excellent manoeuvrability, too.

Employees aren't the only ones benefiting from these tax savings thanks to salary sacrifice schemes – their bosses are too. Organisations could reduce their employers' NI bill for every employee who leases an EV this way. A win-win, in other words. And that's not all. There are incentives such as the Workplace Charging Scheme, which can cover up to 75% of the cost of chargers and their installation, as well as substantially lower running costs.

Then there are the recruitment upsides to factor in. According to the Sustainable Workforce report from Octopus Electric Vehicles – a salary sacrifice scheme provider – 74% of employees want their employers to offer EVs via salary sacrifice.

The CUPRA Raval is ideal for both urban driving and longer journeys - combining clever design with an impressive 277-mile electric range (WLTP)

Embracing electric can slash your carbon footprint and your costs

No matter if you're considering an EV for yourself or your workforce, embracing electric has the potential to slash your carbon footprint and costs – and you'll be futureproofing your motoring too. As the transition to electric has now entered the fast lane, you'll be zipping right ahead of the competition.

"Whether you want to go electric for environmental reasons, financial ones or anything in between," says English, "making the switch is now easier and more affordable than ever."

**Estimated range based on WLTP testing. The accurate range for your vehicle will vary according to a number of different factors which include the route, weather conditions, vehicle load (occupants + luggage), battery age and condition, optional equipment (alloys, tyres, etc.), the use of peripheral energy consumption systems such as heating, air conditioning and heated seats, as well as your driving style. The indicated range has been calculated in compliance with the WLTP standards, which set out test conditions applicable to all car manufacturers to ensure the comparability of these tests for all vehicles.*

Interested in how salary sacrifice can help make EVs more accessible for employees? Find out more at: **cupraofficial.co.uk/cupra-for-business**

PAID FOR BY CUPRA

The actor on being told she was no Ingrid Bergman, forgetting her lines on stage, and not caring about getting older

Q&A
Stockard Channing

Interview: Rosanna Greenstreet

ALAN CHAPMAN/DAVE BENETT/GETTY IMAGES

Born in New York City, Stockard Channing, 82, played Rizzo in the 1978 film Grease. In 1985, she received a Tony for her performance in A Day in the Death of Joe Egg, and in 1994 was Oscar-nominated for her role in the film Six Degrees of Separation. She has three Emmys for her TV work, which includes The West Wing. She makes her directorial debut at the Edinburgh festival with Krapp's Last Tape, in aid of the Wembley to Soweto Foundation, Upstairs at the Roxy until 31 August. Her latest film is Practical Magic 2. She lives in London.

What is your greatest fear?
Climate change.

What is the trait you most deplore in yourself?
Pedantry.

What is the trait you most deplore in others?
Ignorance.

What was your most embarrassing moment?
Fifteen years ago, I totally forgot my lines on stage and was mortified. We skipped two pages of dialogue and took three minutes off the play - to the delight of the audience!

What makes you unhappy?
The loss of moral compass.

What happens when we die?
God knows.

If you could bring something extinct back to life, what would you choose?
A vibrant political culture.

Who would play you in the film of your life?
Miriam Margolyes.

What scares you about getting older?
I'm over that.

Who would play me in the film of my life? Miriam Margolyes

What did you want to be when you were growing up?
A dress designer.

What is the worst thing anyone's said to you?
"Let's face it, you're not Ingrid Bergman." I was 19 and he was a potential boyfriend. My only thought at the time was: "I'm not?"

What do you most dislike about your appearance?
My nose.

What do you owe your parents?
An apology.

What does love feel like?
Coming home.

Which living person do you most despise?
Guess ...

When did you last cry, and why?
At the election of Joe Biden, thinking we were out of the woods. Wrong.

What has been your biggest disappointment?
Not keeping off the last 5lbs.

If not yourself, who would you most like to be?
Miriam Margolyes.

What do you consider your greatest achievement?
Still working.

What keeps you awake at night?
Insomnia.

Would you rather have more sex, money or fame?
Money - so I could give it away.

How would you like to be remembered?
Accurately.

What is the most important lesson life has taught you?
Don't answer every question you're asked.

What happens when we die?
God knows.

Tell us a joke
A man goes to the doctor and takes off his hat to reveal a huge toad on the top of his head. "When did you notice that?" asked the doctor. And the toad answers: "It began as a boil on my ass."

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'I hope my videos will help people notice trash'
Dancer Shoji Yamasaki photographed in Los Angeles

Experience
I dress up as rubbish

As told to Annalise Smith

I've always been interested in the concept of value and what is thought of as rubbish. When people throw things away, a perfectly good table, say, I think, "That's still usable." I'm a dancer and choreographer and hoard clothing – costumes from shows or pieces my mum has lent me. Sometimes, I'll collect random things offered on Facebook.

During the pandemic I was unable to perform but became hyper-aware of everyday movements around me. On daily walks in Los Angeles, where I live, I'd notice pieces of litter being blown about. I felt as if it was trying to get someone's attention, but nobody was looking. I thought: "What if I start mimicking it? What if I used the trash as my choreographer?"

So I started making "duet" videos; they featured a film of litter on one side and another of me dancing while dressed like it on the other. The first TikTok video I posted was in October 2023 – I recreated a dog poo bag blowing in the wind. I wore a green top and trousers, and sat on my knees, shimmying my upper body up and down.

The duet videos didn't take off. After a year of uploading them, I finally decided to post what I thought would be my last one. That featured me imitating an empty takeaway box in a white plastic bag. I wore all white and hunched over a cardboard box with my hands clasped above me and the soles of my feet together on the ground to look like the bag's handles. When that video got 3m views, I thought: "The universe has spoken."

Since then, I've posted more than 100 videos on TikTok and Instagram with the same caption: "PSA: Please pick up your trash". I've dressed as crisp packets, plastic bags and shopping receipts. To recreate them, I layer different pieces of clothing and try to mimic any words or images. I have a rule about not creating additional waste. I don't use glue or tape when making my costumes, only safety pins.

I've made videos of me as crisp packets, plastic bags and shopping receipts

My favourite video is also my most complicated. I dressed as an empty packet of Chex Mix (an American snack) that had been stuffed through a hole in a metal pole. I crouched on my knees on top of a swivel chair, my right arm dangling as I held another chair upside down on top of me with my left arm. That was tricky, as I kept falling off while trying to balance.

The litter I choose to film must be moving in the wind and made of a synthetic material that won't biodegrade. Once I've found something suitable, I record plenty of footage, later choosing the best 15 seconds to use. Then I put the litter in the bin – I want to leave a slightly cleaner place behind. After that, I go home and piece together an outfit that resembles it, then film myself wearing it and in a location that looks similar to where I found it. Then I edit the two videos together.

People don't realise how much work is involved. It's a whole production, because every video I do is like putting on a little show. I am sore the day after filming as I have been contorting my body to the limits of what it can do. The videos may be only 15 seconds long, but I have to repeat moves over and over again to get a good shot. Sometimes, I feel self-conscious filming if other people are nearby, but I'm mostly used to it now. I'm often hunched over while recording, so people think I'm not feeling well. I'm like: "I'm OK! I'm just recording trash!"

I see social media as my virtual gallery space where people can come and scroll through. There will always be haters, but as long as they're talking about my work, that's all that matters. I have received some weird messages. As I'm barefoot in some of the videos, people have said things such as: "I love your feet, they're beautiful." You know you've made it online when you get noticed by the foot fetish community.

It feels as if the world is choking on rubbish. We put things in the bin thinking it disappears, but actually, most of it ends up in landfill. I know I'm not going to be able to change the world, but I hope my videos will help people notice rubbish. And maybe next time they see litter that's moving, it'll remind them to pick it up.
Shoji Yamasaki

Do you have an experience to share? Email experience@theguardian.com

Portrait: Amanda Hakan

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Steph, 66 – **is a retired headteacher who feels Nigel Farage is an angry man who stirs up division**

Steve, 51 – **is a police officer who says the Reform leader is charismatic – but prefers Restore Britain's Rupert Lowe**

Dining across the divide

Can breaking bread bridge political differences?

Interview: Zoe Williams

ADDITIONAL REPORTING: KITTY DRAKE

- *Steph, 66, Chester*
  Occupation *Retired primary school headteacher. Now does consultancy*
  Voting record *Always Labour, and is the local women's officer for her party*
  Amuse bouche *Steph has a bald dog named Archie, and unfortunately he doesn't like having his head touched. He nearly snapped the Duke of Westminster's hand off*

- *Steve, 51, Connah's Quay*
  Occupation *Police officer*
  Voting record *Normally Conservative; Reform UK last time; would consider Restore Britain in the future*
  Amuse bouche *Probably his best day with the police was when a young woman said, "You're Jason Statham – you look like Jason Statham." He logged it, and a colleague added to the log: "The lady was very intoxicated." He and his mate Sean are starting a Jason Statham podcast, one film at a time*

For starters
Steph He's absolutely lovely. We really hit it off. There's a lot of depth to his anecdotes, he's a good storyteller and he listens. The fact that he then comes out with, "I think Rupert Lowe's wonderful; I would stand as a Restore councillor," I think is because he's had his head warped by his time in the police force.
Steve My 15-year-old son said, "I bet you're gonna get a 7ft guy with a beard, in a dress." I thought, what if I get a student who's really loud? Then Steph walked in, and we hit it off straight away.
Steph We shared the sea bass.
Steve I had garlic pitta, a steak.

The big beef
Steph Nigel Farage is a nasty, angry, divisive man. He stands there and says, "I'm not racist, I'm not homophobic, my best friend's black," then he throws a grenade and all the neanderthals react. They're anti-immigrant. Steve couldn't see that – he was just going for the reasonableness of some of the policies and ignoring the ripple effect that the language has. Why is it bringing out all the racists? Why aren't we having reasonable conversations about their other policies? Because of Nigel Farage. The leadership needs to change, then I might look at their policies.
Steve She's got a real downer on Nigel Farage. I think he's a charismatic guy. I had higher hopes for him two years ago than I've got now. Rupert Lowe gives his monthly salary to charity, so I think he's in it for the right reasons. He says what he thinks – he doesn't say it to appeal to the widest possible audience. When they had that big falling out, I thought, you've got such a small party, the time to fall out is when you've got three or four hundred MPs.
Steph As for Restore policies, some of them are bonkers; some of them are so weak, you think, fine, do that.
Steve Steph's got high hopes for Andy Burnham. I just think, the man's lost a leadership election before to Ed Miliband. You lost to that charisma vacuum and now you're the saviour of the country?

Sharing plate
Steph I think immigration is fine as it stands. I don't think we should go to 10 years before you can get indefinite leave to remain. At the moment it's five years, and I know what a hard slog that is: I've seen it up close. We're encouraging our children to go off and see the world, so the likelihood is that they'll fall in love with someone from a different country. I think illegal asylum seekers are such a small percentage, it's been blown out of proportion.
Steve Even as somebody who considers themselves rightwing, I think if somebody's come here and made a positive contribution, let them stay. Obviously, I have no problem with legal immigration – the only thing I did say is that a lot of the time, politicians say we need more immigrants to fill these jobs. But there are one and a half million Brits unemployed. We should have a block on all new asylum claims until we've cleared the backlog.

For afters
Steph He said he thought we were in agreement over Kemi Badenoch's impressive leadership. I absolutely don't want to put my name to that.
Steve After a shaky start, Kemi Badenoch is coming into her own a little bit now. I can see myself voting Conservative again.

Takeaways
Steph Honestly, he was really nice. We didn't stop – we chatted the whole time.
Steve I think we'll probably keep in touch, because she was messaging me this morning, going, "What do you think of a wealth tax? What do you think of the royal family?"

Steph and Steve ate at Maray in Chester; maray.co.uk. Want to meet someone from across the divide? Go to theguardian.com/different-views

Want to dine across the divide?
Scan here to apply

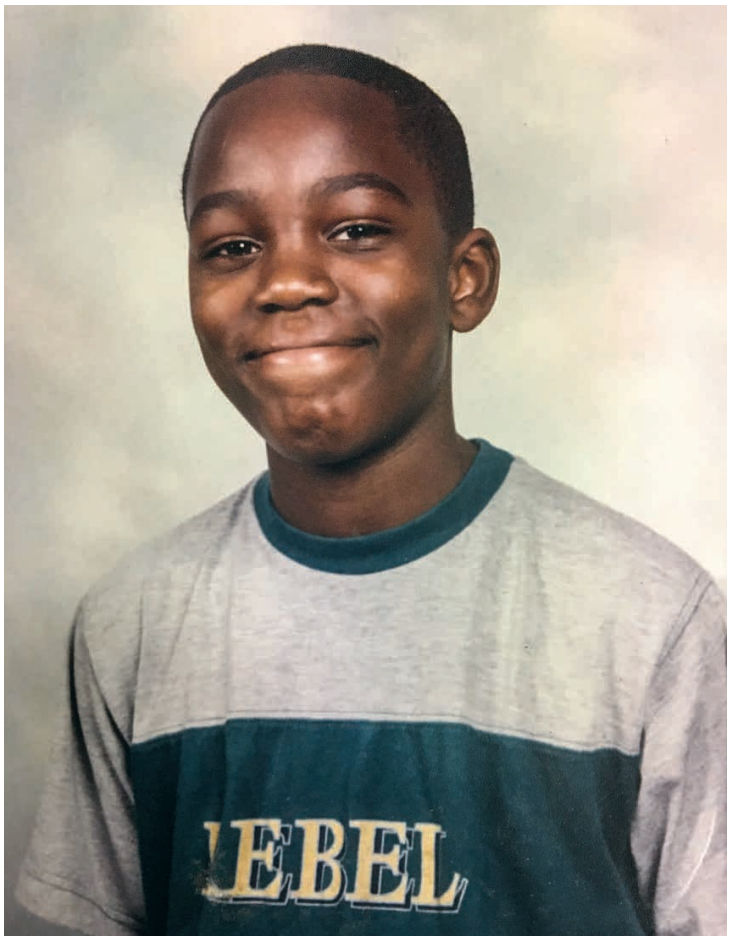
Portrait: Christopher Thomond

Flashback

Comedian Mo Gilligan: 'Drake shared my video, Ian Wright liked a post – then I quit my job in retail'

Interview: Harriet Gibsone
Main portrait: Simon Webb
Styling: Andie Redman

1996 This was my go-to pose. I'd use it for every school photo



Born in Lambeth, south London, in 1988, Mo Gilligan is a comedian and presenter. His online sketches went viral in 2017, which led to his debut tour, Coupla Cans, and the start of his TV career, co-hosting The Big Narstie Show and presenting The Lateish Show. The winner of two Baftas, Gilligan has released three standup specials, most recently In the Moment. His new documentary, Big Chicken: A Fast Food Conspiracy, is available on Netflix now.

This was my go-to pose as a kid. The expression is a combination of me being a bit cheeky, my mum telling me I shouldn't smile with my teeth out, and someone else telling me that I had a nice smile when I did that grin. It was a safe bet, and I would bring it out for every school photo.

I grew up on a council estate near East Dulwich, in south-east London. My childhood was spent with my friends and sisters outside – playing football and cricket and climbing trees or garage roofs until someone told us to get down or come inside. It was a multigenerational place to live, and everyone looked out for each other. I was in awe of anyone who was on TV to the extent that if I ever saw a famous person on the street I would ask them for an autograph. Kriss Akabusi opened our Happy Shopper and I got him to sign my jumper. Once I saw a guy who was on The Bill in Sainsbury's. I wouldn't stop talking about it in school the next day.

My aunts and uncles were funny people who were always taking the mick. If you wore something weird, you would definitely get called out for it. But it wasn't until I became a teenager that I realised the real value in making people laugh. I was never the kid who could draw well, or know what 105 multiplied by 52 was – instead my currency was being silly.

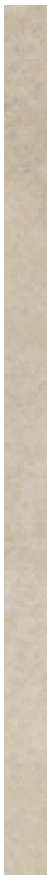
Without realising it, I was developing my style of standup at the back of the bus. I was a big fan of Eddie Murphy and Jim Carrey, and my friends would tell me I was good at doing impressions. Accents, too. I learned how to do a Scottish accent when I was quite young because of watching Trevor in EastEnders. As a young black boy on a council estate, my Australian accent would wow some of the older kids too. "How'd you do that, bro? You can speak Australian – that's crazy, man." Once I realised I could make people on the bus laugh who weren't even at school – just random passengers, who were smirking when I was doing stupid stuff for my mates – I realised I might be on to something.

I am dyslexic, and at school I wasn't the most academic. Thankfully, I had some very supportive drama teachers who unlocked something in me. I didn't realise it at the time, but they were teaching me improv techniques, how to think on my feet. Because of them, I ended up studying performing arts and theatre production at Middlesex University, but I didn't apply myself and I wasn't sure what to do after I graduated.

A lot of people who study drama might get their first foot on the ladder by working front of house in theatres. I had no idea how I would get into that kind of space, so I went to the jobcentre instead. I told them I wanted to work with young people, and they replied: "How about Asda?" After that, I went into retail. It wasn't my dream career, but I realised I could practise some of my acting skills while also making money, by creating a caricature of myself. My first job was at Jo Malone, selling luxury fragrances and body creams and candles to posh people. Customers would come in and ask what different scents were and I would switch into a new mode: "Ah yes, this is Lime Basil Mandarin. Would you like to try? You don't want to apply it to the wrist as it crushes the scent."

Whatever job I was doing, I could shape shift into someone new. It was intensive, as I really did try out every retail job: Thomas Pink, Apple, Levi's. If a chain had already closed I would put it on my CV just to look more experienced. Dixons? Toys R Us? You name it, I worked there. Or pretended to.

When I wasn't getting people to buy stuff, I was building up my standup career. I ran a comedy night at a hotel, and hosted a show every Sunday called The Sunday Show, which was full of up-and-coming creative people – Ed Sheeran would get on stage and play a song, and Cynthia Erivo would do poetry. I was also doing standup at African-Caribbean nights in university towns. I would visit somewhere like Bradford and perform for a crowd of black kids who were a long way from home. I was something familiar to them in an unfamiliar place.



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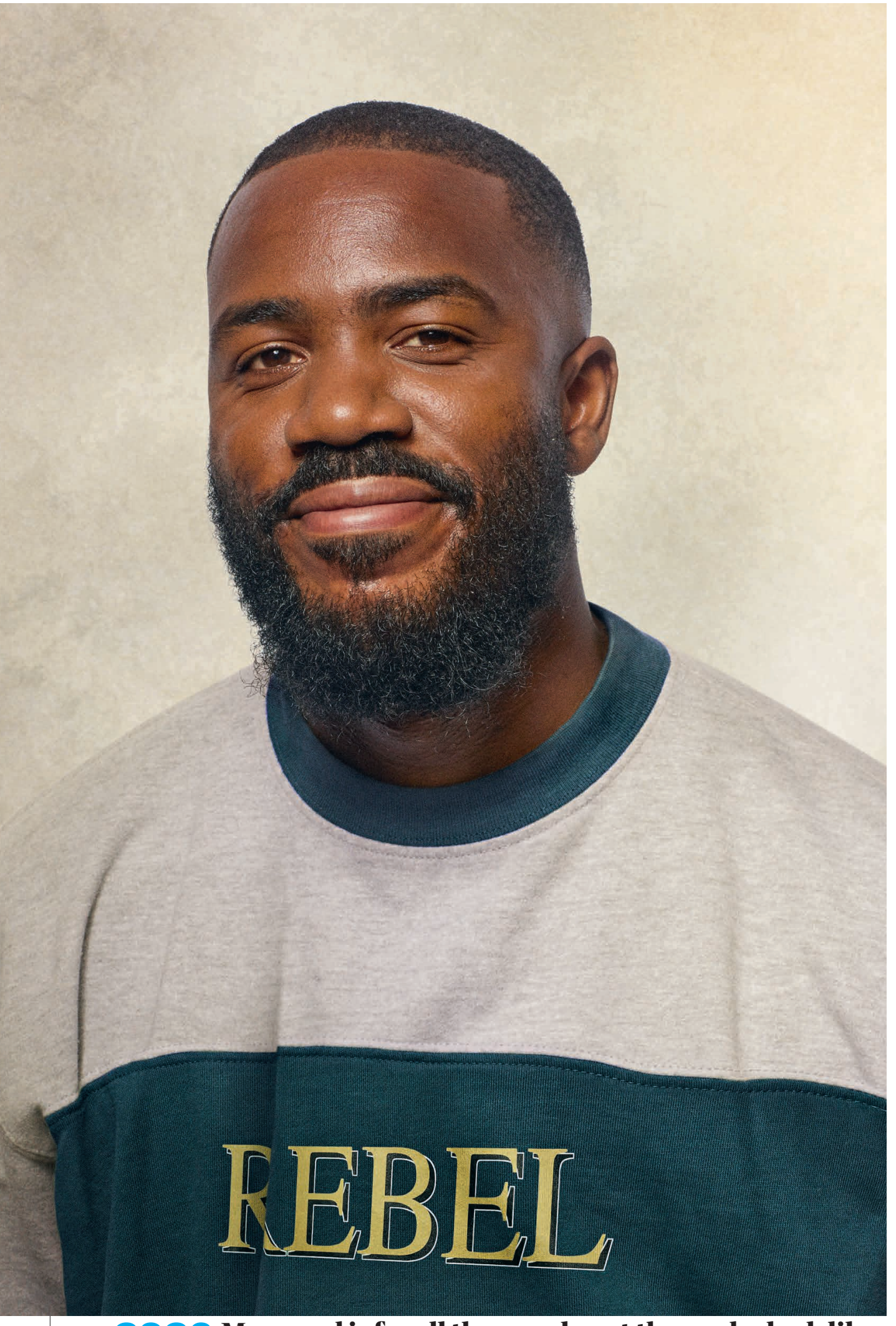


2026 **My award is for all the people out there who look like me and sound like me – big ambitions are achievable**

At the same time, my online videos were growing an audience. I would do impressions and characters and post them on Snapchat, then Instagram. My first proper viral moment was a video about different types of MCs – the MC who misses a drop, the MC who's from up north, the MC who's got an American twang, the cockney MC. It was a one-minute compilation that got shared on Link Up TV, GRM Daily and other meme pages. Then Drake shared something of mine, and Ian Wright liked a post. It was getting harder to juggle new opportunities that were coming in, like radio work, as well as selling 501s, so in the end I quit retail. A month later, I got asked to go to LA for the BET awards. I was staying in a hotel for free, on an all-expenses-paid trip, and standing in the same room as Bruno Mars and Mary J Blige. All I had to do was post something on my socials.

Standup was still the thing I wanted to pursue the most. I met with a promoter and told them I was ready to do a tour, but they were hesitant as they said working with social media people was sometimes hit and miss. Because of the experience I had on stage, they gave me a chance. When the London tickets were released, it sold out in three minutes.

When I got nominated for my first Bafta for The Lateish Show With Mo Gilligan, I didn't think I would win. I was up against Frankie Boyle, Lee Mack and Graham Norton, and I had just started my TV career. As it was lockdown, it was happening virtually, so I was in my house and wearing shorts. I decided to put a shirt on, too, just in case the camera panned to me. Then I won. The feeling was strange – all these people falling silent and listening to me. I didn't want to act like a rock star and give some flippant speech, and I didn't want to be too sentimental, either. But as those words are immortalised I wanted to say something I cared about.

As much as the award was for me, it was really for all of the people out there who looked like me, sounded like me and came from the same kind of places that I grew up. Those big ambitions of being on stage, hosting TV shows, winning awards – none of it feels achievable when you haven't got the right kind of access or connections. But it can be done. You don't have to be the kid getting your jumper signed outside the Happy Shopper. You can be the one signing it.

At 22, Bella Ramsey has already been on our screens for 10 years, was watched by 32 million in the Last of Us season one finale, and nominated for every award going. But they still find it strange to be called an actor. They talk to *Rebecca Nicholson* about gender, growing up in public and going on Celebrity Traitors

Portraits: Linda Brownlee

ELLA RAMSEY often feels more comfortable around older people. The actor, 22, who is non-binary and uses they/them pronouns, has been working professionally since they were 11, when they got their first TV job as the child noblewoman Lyanna Mormont in Game of Thrones. For half of their life, they have been in adult environments, talking to adults, working with adults. Even so, the London cafe in which Ramsey has chosen to meet makes any retirement home look like a creche. It is full of old men with their dogs, popping in for a cup of tea and a morning chat.

"It feels like it belongs in the Midlands. It feels a bit, like, shit and familiar," says Ramsey, who grew up in the East Midlands and can say that with affection. Their curly hair is short, pushed back off their face, and they have a single gold hoop in one ear. The plan had been to go for a walk this morning, but it is raining so we have a cup of tea and wait for the drizzle to pass. Ramsey seems both younger and older than 22, depending on the moment. Sometimes, within a single sentence, they sound ancient and wise, and also like a bookish teenager, discovering with amazement how they think they might feel about the world.

Perhaps this, too, is a result of being on film and television sets for so long. Legend has it that Ramsey's character in Game of Thrones was only supposed to be in a single scene, but their performance was one of pure grit, and they remained in the show for three seasons, almost until its bitter end. That grit took another shape in Lena Dunham's charming medieval comedy film Catherine Called Birdy, in which they played a young English noblewoman scheming to reject the suitors who wanted to trap her, and it appears again in the British prison drama Time, in which Ramsey was a pregnant heroin addict. But it was HBO's massive, dystopian drama The Last of Us, an adaptation of the popular video game, that made them a name internationally.

Ramsey was cast as its young lead, Ellie, an orphan who, in the midst of a zombie-like apocalypse, joins forces with Joel (Pedro Pascal), who becomes a father figure to her. When it first aired in 2023, Ramsey and Pascal found themselves at the centre of one of the year's most successful and hyped new shows. The duo became the object of parasocial ardour, with fans rooting for their cross-generational friendship, and both were nominated for every acting award going – Ramsey for two Emmys, two Golden Globes, two Critics Choice awards, an Actor award and a Bafta.

Ellie is a complex character, brittle and petulant, yet Ramsey's performance gives her vulnerability and heart. As with Time and Game of Thrones, the actor has a knack for conveying rough-edged softness, for young women who mask their inner turmoil by fronting up to the world.

In person, Ramsey seems so earnest and gentle that it is easy to forget just how much they have done over the past 10 years. One benefit of working so hard, for so long, is that they have been able to buy their first flat, close to where we're sitting today, on the edge of a lovely park in a suburban area of London. They have been unpacking boxes this morning. "I feel like this cafe might become my regular eating spot," says Ramsey. "They also do jacket potatoes, which is my favourite thing. No one does jacket potatoes any more, properly."

Ramsey feels guilty about the fact that they have bought a flat at 22. "It feels very wrong! You're not supposed to do that until you're older." The flat is small, cosy, one-bedroom, and they are living alone, happily. Their thoughts about it unspool at length, as they talk out the good and the bad, each argument undulating softly, taking its turn. Ramsey often seems as if they are in discussion with themselves, carefully weighing up both sides of a point before they decide to make it.

"I've done it a bit early. I started working when I was 11 and I'm now 22, so it's been 10 years, and I guess people maybe start working when they're 21 and then buy a house when they're 31, so I don't know. Buying a house is impossible now, and it's only because I ended up in this industry, that pays people too much money, that I've been able to do it." They take a breath. "It just feels like a glitch in the system. I feel so embarrassed by it."

LIVING ALONE SUITS RAMSEY; they need it. "Else I sort of become almost less of a person. I become whoever I'm around, in a way. I just meld to the people around me." Is that a people-pleasing thing? "I think so, but it's also an *everything* thing." For example, they say, right now they are looking at me, so they can't see themselves. "In my head, it's like you're the only one who's here. So, yeah, I don't know. It's an interesting thing that I'm just beginning to understand." I am not quite sure I do understand, but it sounds like an excess of empathy. It also sounds as if Ramsey relishes being alone, and being alone is not common when they are working. "It's really nice to be able to come home and just be me and I'm not having to worry about how anyone else is feeling."

Ramsey prefers to keep their family's lives private, and does not want to specify where they come from in the East Midlands, but it sounds rural and remote. "It was quite specific and wonderful." School was a drive away, and it wasn't the kind of place where you could walk to a friend's house, or vice versa, so they kept themselves busy with after-school clubs. When they were 10, they auditioned for the Television Workshop in Nottingham, the young actors' group that has been called the working-class Rada, and which counts Samantha Morton, Jack O'Connell, Vicky McClure and Felicity Jones among its attenders. Ramsey failed to get in the first time, but was invited back to re-audition at age 11. "And then I got in. It was such a good lesson. For your very first introduction to be a rejection, I think, is perfect."

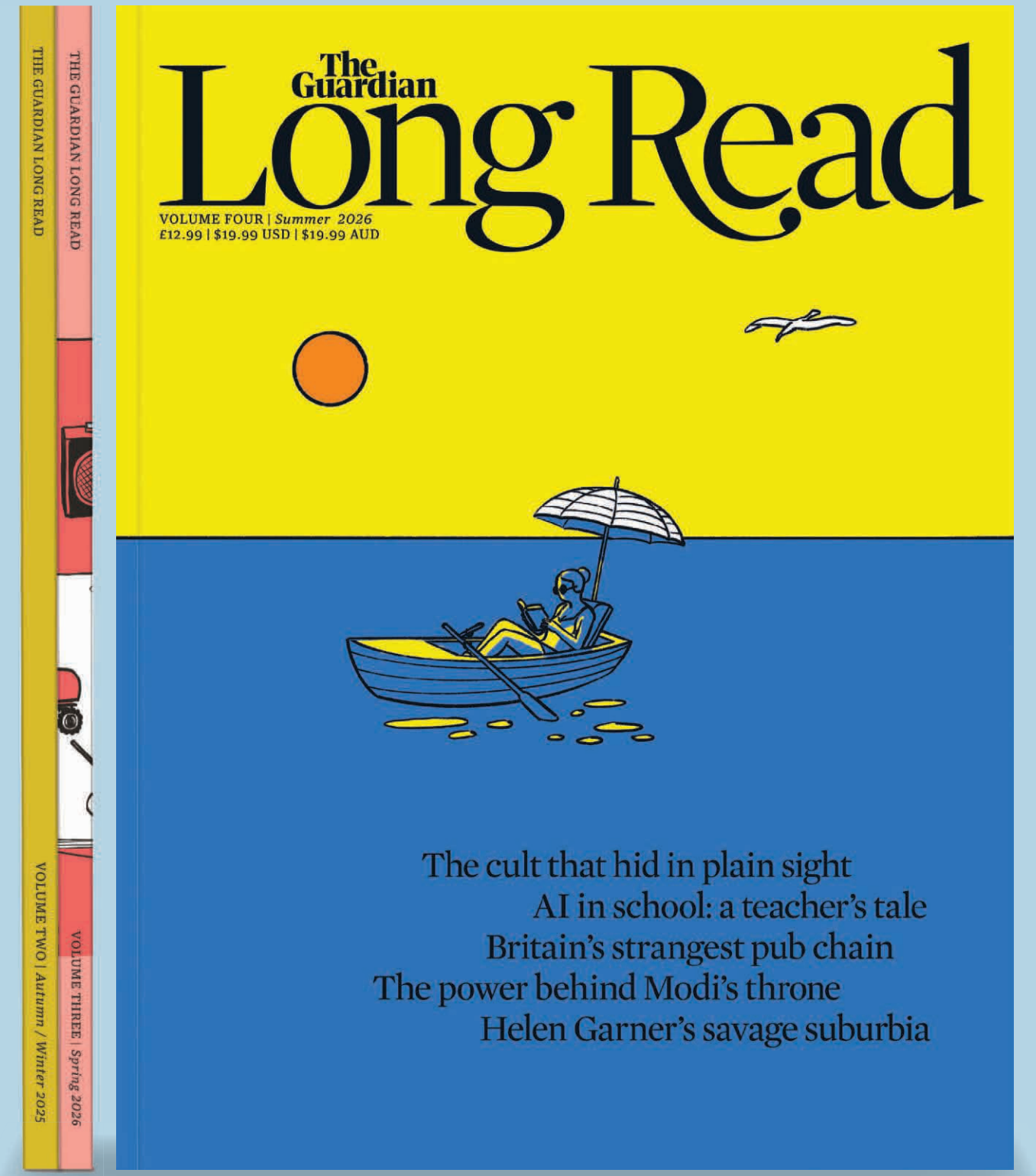
Did they audition because they wanted a career in acting? "No! I definitely didn't go there with that in mind." The Workshop is firm about that not being the point of the group, and Ramsey insists that they only took part for their own enjoyment. "And then I started to get auditions for things. And even then, I never thought about it as being a career. It was just fun, and then when it did become my career, and everyone started calling it that, I found it very strange, and still do." Can they call it a career now? "Nooo," Ramsey says, cringing a little. "Feels wrong." Maybe in time? "I mean, it has definitely been an experience that is now feeling like work, which it hadn't when I was younger."

Ramsey seems to have escaped the notorious curse of the child star. They seem nice and normal, in so much as it can be normal that 32 million people watched them in the season one finale of The Last of Us. As a child, they were protected from some of the industry's cruelties, yet, ever the pragmatist, they suggest that such protections were both good and bad for them. Take The Worst Witch, an adaptation of the beloved children's books by Jill Murphy. Ramsey was 11 when they were cast as Mildred Hubble, the main character. They were not allowed to have a parent chaperone them on set – "I think to avoid pushy stage parents," they say today. "But it was terrible for me. I'd never been away from home, even for a sleepover. I didn't like school trips. I wanted to be around my parents. And then I was away from home for 16 weeks, over the summer. Home at weekends, but in a hotel room by myself [while working], at age 11."

The young cast were looked after by professional chaperones, but, as the lead, Ramsey felt the weight of responsibility. "I was put in an interconnecting room with one who was 10 and told that I was to help look after her," they recall. At the time, that felt fine. "I felt like I could just do it. I didn't feel that young." And now? "Now I look at 11-year-olds, and I'm like, God, you're *tiny*." People like to ask Ramsey if they feel as if they missed out on having a traditional childhood. "I think some of the freedom and innocence of it, sure. But I was having so much fun. I didn't want to be anywhere else other than on set." They loved acting, loved being part of something. "It was one of the worst times and the best times of my young little life. I guess it sealed the thing that was already there, of being older than I was."

Recently, for the first time since The Worst Witch, Ramsey found themselves acting with a group of their peers. In the film Sunny Dancer, they play a teenage cancer survivor called Ivy, who heads off to summer camp with other teenagers who have had, or who have, cancer. Ivy is angry at the world, and feels isolated by what she has been through. It is a sweet, wonky coming-of-age film, with a very British eye on the teenage experience. There is banter, there is sex in a tent, and there is a lot of vodka being swilled from the bottle.

"I was so nervous that I'd be on the edge of things, and that they'd all get along really well, and that I'd be the odd one out, or not as included," Ramsey admits. They have spoken before about being miserable at school and not fitting in with people their own age. "I've always felt slightly on the outside, too old and too young at the same time," they say today, which makes sense. They were more comfortable around adults, yet their silliness and sense of fun seemed childish to their schoolmates. "It's probably a neurodiverse thing as well," they say. Ramsey had long



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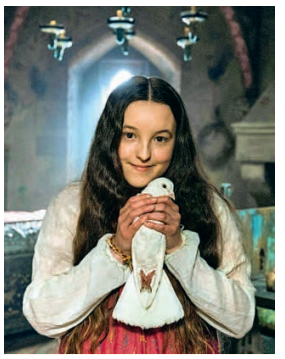

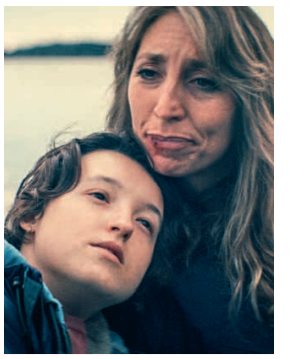
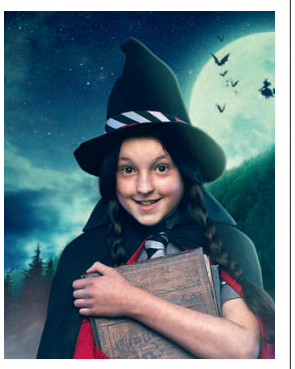

Bella Ramsey in Game of Thrones, 2011 (top row, left to right); Catherine Called Birdy, 2022; Time, 2023. Bottom row, left to right: with Pedro Pascal in The Last of Us, 2024; Sunny Dancer and with Daisy Haggard in Maya, both 2026; and aged 11 in The Worst Witch, 2017

PREVIOUS PAGES: STYLING: LUCY TEMPEST WALKER. HAIR AND MAKEUP: WENDY TURNER USING DR LEVY FOR SKIN; LISA ELDRIDGE FOR MAKEUP; SAM MCKNIGHT FOR HAIR. T-SHIRT: SANDRO. SWEATER: WITH NOTHING UNDERNEATH. DENIM JACKET: LEVI'S AT ROKIT. THIS PAGE: ALBUM/ALAMY; CAPITAL PICTURES/ALAMY; AP; SUNNY DANCER DISTRIBUTION LIMITED; CHANNEL 4; BBC

suspected that they were neurodivergent, and received a formal diagnosis when filming the first season of The Last of Us. "I just felt like I couldn't access anyone, or that people couldn't access me. I just felt a bit strange."

Sunny Dancer sounds as if it was liberating for Ramsey. "As I've got older, I've found people my age easier. I think everyone levelled out." The film's cast was effectively living out a version of the summer camp that they were depicting on screen. "Everyone got on with each other in slightly different ways, and started to annoy each other a little bit, in a familial, sibling way. It was *so* fun." There is a lot of drinking in the film. Ramsey once said that they had never been drunk. Is that still the case? "I'd say I've got a little bit closer to that," they reply, coyly. "Maybe a little bit happy? But I've still never had a hangover." Suddenly, Ramsey sounds exactly like a 22-year-old.

The film was supposed to be the last time that Ramsey would play a teenager. "It was going to be my final big bang," they say. But they're playing another one, in Maya, a new thriller for Channel 4, in which Ramsey stars as a teenage girl forced into a witness protection programme with her mother, played by Daisy Haggard, who also writes and co-directs the series. "I really thought that I wanted to move away from that, but then, also, I'm only going to be able to play teenagers for a very limited amount of time in my life. I may as well, if they're interestingly written." It has been produced by the company behind The Tourist and Fleabag, so may well be worth that brief return to adolescence.

IT SOUNDS AS IF RAMSEY IS AS BUSY as ever, then, but right now they're not filming anything at all. They are writing a TV series, which they can't yet talk about, and working on music with friends. "I really don't want to just be an actor who makes music. I really want them to be separate," they say. They are taking it seriously. "I don't want people to listen just because it's me." Later in the summer, they will go back to Vancouver for the third and final season of The Last of Us. Filming has already begun, but Ramsey's services are not yet needed. Ellie is absent from the story for a period of time, as the focus has shifted to her nemesis, Abby, played by Kaitlyn Dever.

Ramsey has enjoyed this time off. "I was getting to a place where I'd done a bit too much and was starting to not enjoy it, a bit, and not feel inspired, and feel a bit resentful of it." They never wanted to feel that way about acting. "I couldn't do that, for my 11-year-old self. It was their favourite thing in the world. So I took a step away, and now I am really excited to go back and I miss it."

They can't talk about what is coming up in The Last of Us, not because of any restrictions, but because they have yet to see the scripts. During season one, their friendship with Pascal became a fan favourite. Ramsey called Pascal "Pedge". Pascal called Ramsey "Bellie". For plot purposes, he was barely in season two. Are they still in touch? "Yeah. But, like, yes, loosely in touch, yeah. But it feels like an entirely separate thing." Their friendship has been endlessly clipped and memed – him calling Ramsey his "blessing"; Ramsey talking of their "deep-rooted connection" – and when the topic comes up, Ramsey has the look of someone who has been asked about it several thousand times before. "People get invested in the characters," they say, but now seems weary of the fuss and won't go any deeper. "I'm not sure. It's sort of weird to talk about it … Let's move on to a different topic."

It is still wet outside, but it feels like we need a change of scene. "I'm like a dog: I need to be walked," says Ramsey. "If I don't walk in a day, I feel it. I have to move my body somehow." They have sturdy boots and an outdoorsy jacket, so we decide to go for a stroll through the rain. Ramsey turned 18 while making the first season of The Last of Us. It sounds as if that time was a transformative one. It was when they realised that they were neurodivergent. It was when they talked about their gender identity. In 2023, they told the New York Times that their gender "has always been very fluid" and that they would tick a box marked "non-binary", if asked.

Ramsey has always talked about this with sensitivity and nuance, but they say now that they feel they weren't given enough warning about how much of a talking point it might become. Just before press for The Last of Us began, they were asked which pronouns they would be using. "I'd expressed being in the middle." For Ramsey, it was just a "helpful descriptor. And then suddenly it became a huge thing, where it's, like, this is your identity and it's who you are. I wasn't aware of the impact of that, both positively and negatively. But I think the positive impact outweighs the negative, in terms of being visible or giving a name to an experience."

They remain relaxed about pronouns. "Like, people will see me and they're going to go 'she' because, of course, I would. I accidentally misgender people. It's a thing that even I have to learn. There's a misconception that if you get someone's pronouns wrong, they're going to be offended and it's a big thing. It's just not a big deal as long as you're respectful, and I think if somebody does correct you, then you respect that and you try your best. And so I'm pretty chill about it."

What is different now is that their family also uses they/them pronouns for them. "I just think it feels the most accurate, is all that it is. They've been lovely about it. They always got a free pass, but it started to be weird because everyone in my life was calling me 'they' except them, and they know me the best. They were, like, maybe we can just try. And so it's very sweet, hearing them try." Again, they say, they are very laid-back about it. "I understand why it has become such a thing that people want to talk about and talk to me about, but it really is just a descriptive word for part of my experience of being in the world."

In the same interview, Ramsey also said that they were not 100% straight. "I said something about being a bit wavy," they laugh. "I mean, I think most people are, slightly. Like, who knows who you're falling in love with, you know? You just meet a person and you fall in love with them, and that's kind of all there is to it." What has your experience of that been, so far? "I've experienced it and I just think it's a beautiful part of life." I ask if they're in love now. "I'm not talking about that!" they say, squirming a little, like the teenager that they have only recently been.

Ramsey may have enjoyed some time off recently, but managed to fit in filming the second series of The Celebrity Traitors, alongside a pleasantly eccentric cast, including Miranda Hart, Richard E Grant, Maya Jama and Ross Kemp. They said yes to doing it because they love the party game Mafia, on which the show is loosely based. "I started playing it in the Television Workshop, so I've been playing it since I was 11. I love it so much. I've done Mafia nights at my flat. So fun. In my head, it was just, like, I'm going to go to this castle and play this game for two weeks." Had they seen the first series? "Yeah. So I'm, like, you just go and you do that. But I'm too naive. I should know, after doing this for so many years, that what you see on screen isn't actually what it is," they say, with a smile.

Are they nervous about it coming out? "No, not really." A pause. "Well, actually, I might try to be out of the country," they say, laughing. They are aware that it will bring them attention, and for the most part, right now, they can wander around the park, with the old men and the dogs, without many second glances coming their way. "So the idea that I'm going to be more famous for a bit … " they say, and taper off.

Ramsey has learned, over the past decade, that fame is fleeting and it comes and goes. "Suddenly everyone recognises you and you're famous for two weeks, and then there's somebody else. So it will be a bit of a thing for a few weeks and then people will move on, you know?" They say this with the wisdom of an old hand, someone who has been at this for a long time already. "So I'm not too worried," they say, sweetly, and set off home, to unpack more boxes ●

Sunny Dancer will be in cinemas across the UK from 14 August.

'He doesn't want to admit it, but I think it's breaking him a bit,' Yorleny Weigel (left) says of Gerson Turcios (below), who lived with her and his brother Henoch in Rhinebeck, New York

THE TOWN THAT TOOK ON ICE

Gerson Turcios was 17 when he fled violence in Honduras to build a new life in the US. Six years later, he was mowing lawns in his home town of Rhinebeck, New York, when immigration officers seized him. Within hours, his friends and neighbours sprang into action. Could they stop his deportation? *Alex Hannaford* reports

Portraits: Celeste Sloman

GERSON TURCIOS DIDN'T RECOGNISE THE men standing next to a couple of dark SUVs outside his house one July afternoon last year. He figured they were lost and approached to see if he could help. A slim 23-year-old with short dark hair and big brown eyes, Turcios had just finished work mowing lawns in the pretty town of Rhinebeck, in New York's Hudson Valley. The men asked if he knew someone called Jimmy – he did, but Jimmy hadn't lived in the small, white weatherboard house with Turcios, his brother and his brother's girlfriend for a while.

The men noted Turcios's accent and asked where he was from. Turcios didn't answer, so one took out his phone and snapped a photograph. The next thing Turcios knew, he was in handcuffs in the back of one of the SUVs and on his way to an ICE processing centre in Newburgh, New York, then on to a detention centre.

Mass deportation has been the defining mission of Donald Trump's second presidency. In the year since he took office, ICE – United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement – has deported nearly a quarter of a million people from inside the US (half a million including from its borders) as part of an immigration crackdown. These forceful apprehensions, which have in some cases resulted in fatal shootings of potential deportees and bystanders, have resulted in protests – and sparked international outrage. Behind the statistics, though, are stories of hope and perseverance; of young immigrants who risked everything crossing rivers and deserts to build lives,

start businesses and put down roots in communities that are now fighting to keep them.

Back then, as he was shackled and led to his cell, sure he was about to be deported back to Honduras, Turcios – an immigrant who had made a terrifying journey as a teenager, fleeing violence there – had no idea that his community in Rhinebeck was already mobilising; that they would raise tens of thousands of dollars in days, galvanise support from Hollywood actors and filmmakers who also called the town home, and even recruit the lawyer who essentially wrote the book on stopping ICE deportations around the nation to represent him.

I'd moved to Rhinebeck with my own family from Texas during the pandemic, drawn to the bucolic countryside and good schools. Our own daughter now walks the same high school hallways Turcios once did. For me, and a lot of other people who call this small town home, Turcios's arrest was personal.

"Well, it's happened," wrote actor Griffin Dunne on Instagram. "ICE has come to my beloved Dutchess County and kidnapped a hard working kid with his own local lawn care business, and without a criminal record, off our tranquil streets." But he added, "This is only the beginning." Dunne, who has a home in Rhinebeck, told his followers that the community had started a war chest to defend Turcios. "Our pressure has brought about a hearing for Gerson at 11:00 tomorrow morning at Thurgood Marshall Courthouse for those who wish to show support. To my Rhinebeck neighbors, a bus will leave from Tops [grocery store] at 7:00 am."

SIX YEARS EARLIER, around 9pm on a freezing December night, Turcios and three other migrants had stood by the southern banks of the Rio Grande river in Mexico, looking across into Texas as flames torched the desert brush behind them; Mexican soldiers had set it alight to flush them out. With nowhere left to go, Turcios turned to the others. "We are right here," he told them. "The other side is the United States." Another boy checked that everyone was able to swim – they were – but all Gerson could think about was alligators, which had occasionally been known to inhabit the Rio Grande.

The four boys jumped into the black water together, fighting the current as it pushed them downstream. Along that stretch, near McAllen, Texas, the width of the Rio Grande ranges from 45 to 90 meters. Finally, soaking wet, they scrambled up a concrete wall on the US side. They ran through scrubland until headlights appeared behind them, then three German shepherds. A heavier boy was dragged down by the dogs as he scaled a fence; the others scattered. Turcios sprinted until three cars boxed him in and US immigration officers emerged with guns drawn. "If you keep running," they shouted, "we're gonna shoot your legs." Turcios stopped, put his hands up, then fell to his knees and felt a boot between his shoulder blades as they threw him to the ground and handcuffed him. He had spent six weeks on a journey that had nearly broken him. Against all odds, he had made it across the river. And now he'd been caught.

In 2019, during the first Trump administration, an adult detained by Border Patrol crossing into the US was increasingly likely to be sent back to Mexico to wait for their immigration case to be heard. Turcios, though, was under 18, and the law dictated he be taken to refugee resettlement housing for minors. Turcios stayed at a facility in Long Island for almost a month until his brother, Henoch, and Henoch's girlfriend, Yorleny Weigel, were allowed to pick him up and return to Weigel's home in Rhinebeck.

Henoch had come to the US in 2017 via a tortuous route, and Turcios hadn't seen him for six years. Their first stop was a Wendy's fast food joint for a burger – "So big," Turcios now recalls, "I didn't know how to eat it."

He would have to wait for the government to notify him of his first immigration hearing, but soon the Covid pandemic would throw the courts into chaos, with some hearings postponed indefinitely and others rescheduled then postponed again, leaving Turcios in limbo.

Weigel showed Turcios his room, then drove him across the river to a big outlet store in the city of Kingston to buy clothes. He spoke no English, so Weigel registered him with a county language integration programme and with the local high school. In the summer of 2020, ahead of the start of the school year, he was introduced to Anna Lawson, who would be one of his classmates. Lawson was in advanced Spanish and, as Covid was still forcing people to meet virtually, they spoke regularly over Zoom. "He is a really lovely, positive person," Lawson says. "He'd often be sitting outside, talking about how much he enjoyed Rhinebeck."

On the first day of school, Turcios was afraid he'd be arrested by the police officer who sat outside in his car for an hour each morning as kids entered the building – just under half of US state schools have police patrol on campus – but after his first day, that fear passed. "After that I wasn't afraid. I was excited," he says. "But I didn't speak any English at all." Turcios immediately hit it off with his classmates. Brendan Dougherty shared a study hall with him. "Gerson is a very sociable guy, so it wasn't difficult to strike up a conversation with him," Dougherty says. "And his English progressed very quickly. Each day we'd go outside and play basketball."

Turcios finished high school in the early summer of 2022 and began working in the kitchen of a local French restaurant and, in his spare time, for a crew that did landscaping and house maintenance, and mowed lawns. One of his first clients was Jenny Friedberg, a creative director and producer who had moved up to Rhinebeck from the city during the pandemic. Turcios and the maintenance crew painted her basement in Brooklyn, and excavated 24in of bedrock under her barn in Rhinebeck. "Whatever they did, Gerson was always there," Friedberg says. "He was the youngest of the crew, the smiliest, the most helpful, and my favourite."

In the summer of 2025, Turcios left the restaurant and went to work full-time with the crew. At 7.30pm on 18 July 2025, Friedberg's phone rang. It was Carlos, Turcios's boss. Turcios had been detained by ICE, he told her, and he didn't know what to do.

Friedberg made several calls that evening. The first was to Luciano Valdivia, a local restaurateur and president of Rhinebeck's chamber of commerce. The next was to Amanda Miller, a local attorney. Then John Reinish, a political communications strategist she knew. Within 24 hours, they'd set up a Spotfund, an online fundraising platform, to raise money for Turcios's legal battle. Miller called Gregory Copeland, a law school friend who had pioneered legal strategies to stop ICE deportations and had also moved to Rhinebeck.

Copeland was a nationally recognised civil rights and immigration attorney, and co-founder of the Rapid Defense Network, a non-profit providing pro bono legal support to immigrants facing deportation. He was also the subject of the documentary Guerrilla Habeas, which looked at the legal strategy it employed to stop deportations at the last moment. That strategy hinged on filing habeas corpus petitions, which empower federal judges to compel the authorities to justify detentions, a power enshrined in the constitution. Doing this forces cases out of immigration courts and into federal court, where due process can be properly considered and immigrants have a fairer shot at justice.

Miller says Copeland had experience fighting "the biggest machine there is – the federal government". But since his move to Rhinebeck, he had stopped practising civil rights and immigration law, and had turned his attention to estate planning for clients. Still, Miller knew there was no one better to help Turcios.

"It wasn't clear to me immediately that I would help him, but I went into triage mode, gathering information and figuring out what our options were," Copeland says. As soon as Copeland got Turcios's "A-Number" – the alien registration number assigned by the US Department of Homeland Security to non-citizens– he could check his status in the system. He discovered that, years earlier, Turcios had been ordered deported "in absentia" for missing a hearing. During Covid, courts repeatedly moved locations; Turcios missed a notice despite living at the same address he'd always provided.

Copeland knew it was now vital to get the Rhinebeck community to show up for him. "If you consider what the government evaluates when justifying someone's detention, it's whether they're a danger to the community and a flight risk," Copeland says. "The community is typically not going to show up for a dangerous person. And you're less of a flight risk if there's a strong community around you."

It was a matter of urgency to identify where Turcios was being taken and where he was going next. Copeland says it's not an exact science, but after working these cases as long as he had, you get a feel for it. A red flag was if he had been sent to Louisiana, a staging location for deportations – at this point, he had not. However, Turcios had been detained with his passport – another red flag. "[The government] needs two things to remove you: a travel document and a final order of removal," Copeland says. "They need something to show who you are because in immigration court one of the first things they need to establish is that you're not a citizen." If an immigrant picked up by ICE doesn't have a travel document on them, that buys their attorneys more time.

Meanwhile, Valdivia asked Leah Conklin, another resident who worked in international criminal justice

CELESTE SLOMAN/THE GUARDIAN; COURTESY OF ENOCH TURCIOS AND YORLENY WEIGEL

reform, to get involved. Within days of Turcios's arrest, a crack team was coming together, but time was of the essence. "One of the reasons they make arrests on Friday, I think, is because you can't catch up," Valdivia says, "and if you don't know where they're going, you don't know how to stop it."

Copeland was looking at the online detainee locator system, trying to get a feel for where Turcios was moving – through which processing centre; which detention centre. In New York state, if you are taken to Federal Plaza in Manhattan and then your location "goes dark", that's an indicator you could be bound for a deportation flight. "It's very relevant for filing a habeas petition," Copeland says, "because you have to file where they're detained." If you don't know where your client is, you can't file and they can be deported. "So it's a game they're playing – hiding the person."

Conklin had been calling around law firms but found it impossible to get a lawyer quickly enough. On Sunday, Copeland agreed to take on Turcios's case himself. "I had created the Rapid Defense Network because there's a small window in which you have to do this. It's like a death penalty case: you have to strike while the iron's hot or you're dead." By that evening, with Miller's help, Copeland had filed an emergency petition on Turcios's behalf, seeking a stay to allow him to consult with lawyers and challenge his removal order. Conklin says that the community came together in record time.

Valdivia messaged some other Rhinebeck residents he knew could amplify Turcios's story. He called Dunne, the actor and writer who had starred in An American Werewolf in London and After Hours, and whom Valdivia counted as a friend. He texted film-maker Andrew Jarecki, who donated, as did actor Paul Rudd, who co-owns a sweet shop in Rhinebeck and lives there with his family. Word spread. Other contributions came in from all over the US and beyond.

Dunne began posting about Turcios's case on social media. "It was the first time I've ever used Instagram without kind of being embarrassed about self-promotion because I had a movie coming out," he says. "It made sense to me for the first time. I was just struck by the inhumanity and the contagion of cruelty."

Friedberg says that when Turcios was arrested, she had a reckoning with herself: "This sort of recognition of how we don't often know the people that have been working for us or near us for years." She had never asked about Turcios's story.

Actor Griffin Dunne, who has raised awareness of Turcios's plight. Opposite, from top: school friend Brendan Dougherty; Turcios before he left Honduras; and with his brother Henoch in 2021

TURCIOS SPENT HIS early childhood in the small town of Balfate on Honduras's northern coast. His father, Juan, raised cattle. Irma, his mother, gave birth to 10 children. The disappearance of his eldest brother, Amilcar, is one of Turcios's earliest memories. He was four when his brother went missing after travelling by boat to Roatán, a Honduran island, to seek a better life. Of the five people who made the trip, authorities recovered the bodies of three. Amilcar and the boat's captain were never found. Turcios's family never learned the truth; they suspect it had something to do with organised crime, but they've come to accept that Amilcar is dead.

While there has been a drop in violent crime in the last couple of years, historically Honduras has been one of the most dangerous countries in the world, with gangs vying for control of drugs and extortion rackets. A decade ago, it frequently topped global lists of the highest murder rates in non-war zone countries, fuelled by its position as a major transit hub for South American cocaine heading to the US.

"My mother was afraid, so she decided we should move from that place where she lost her son," Turcios says. The family relocated to just outside the large city of San Pedro Sula and stayed there for nine years. Turcios went to school, but eventually they sold up and moved to a house in the mountains. It was beautiful, he says, but dangerous; you could never be sure which was more deadly – the criminal gangs who stole livestock, or the venomous snakes and other wildlife.

They had 10 cows to tend and a few horses, and they began constructing their own house. Laundry was done in a small stream and cooking over fire. Walking to the city took nine hours, over mountain passes; Turcios recalls jumping on his father's shoulders to cross rivers.

By the time Turcios moved to the mountains, his brother Henoch had already migrated to the US. Henoch says he travelled from Honduras, across Mexico by train, without any money and had to beg for food. He spent three months in Monterrey, where he almost had to have his left hand amputated due to an infection. A friend helped him pay for the medication – the same friend would eventually take in Henoch in Rhinebeck. After he'd recovered enough, he hitched a ride on a train to the border town of Sonoyta, then spent 22 days walking through the southern desert into Arizona. He says he nearly died after spending weeks without eating, surviving on nothing but water.

Eventually, Turcios's parents decided to move back to town as they wanted his younger sisters, aged eight and 10, to go to school, and to be nearer to a hospital in case they got sick. Turcios stayed in the mountains, living alone for six months so his father wouldn't have to sell his animals, but he was an hour away by foot from the nearest house. His father gave him a gun for safety and most nights he'd lie awake, clutching it, and listening to the cries of animals in the wilderness.

After the 16-year-old son of his nearest neighbour was murdered over drugs, Turcios's siblings decided it was time for him to leave Honduras. One day, when visiting his sister in town, he was told that the following morning a man would arrive who would help him cross into Mexico and travel to the US to join his brother. "I didn't have a future in Honduras," he says. "If you wanted to go to college, you had to pay a lot of money and my parents couldn't afford it. And I knew if I went to the United States I would learn how to speak English and it would be better for me."

Two days later he was travelling across Guatemala by bus and car, under the "care" of a coyote – a people smuggler he had paid 12,000 Honduran pesos, the equivalent of about £350 – or, as he recalls, the amount he'd received for a cow he'd sold five days earlier. Turcios had been told the back route through the mountains would keep him safe. He, his coyote and a group of other migrants moved only at night, but safety proved elusive. At a bus stop in Guatemala, armed officers boarded and ordered passengers to strip. Turcios had hidden his money in his sock,

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Rhinebeck residents and Turcios supporters (from left) Amanda Miller and Gregory Copeland, both attorneys, and Luciano Valdivia, restaurateur and former president of the chamber of commerce

out of sight. The coyote paid the officers off and they kept moving. Hours later, another police stop. This time the driver was pulled from the van, kicked and beaten while officers held a pistol to his head. Only when the driver produced 25,000 Mexican pesos (about £1,000) did they relent.

After 16 nights in a safe house, one migrant demanded better treatment from the people smugglers and that they get moving. Three strangers dragged him outside and he never returned.

The journey took a month and a half. In early December, Turcios and his closest companion, Antonio, were roused at midnight and, together with four others, were packed into a van and dumped in desolate brush. Turcios and Antonio were from the same state in Honduras but hadn't known each other before. The others were from different countries – El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico. "I was 17. Antonio was 28 and like my older brother," Turcios says. "His wife and kid had moved to the US a year before and lived in Georgia, so he was trying to reunite with them."

A guide led them through darkness for 30 minutes. By 3am they had joined 40 others alongside the Rio Grande, shivering in the winter cold. The border was not unguarded. Helicopters buzzed low, forcing them to hide in the grassland and scrub. Mexican army troops encircled them, weapons raised, setting fire to the surrounding brush to flush out the remaining migrants, most of whom fled into the night. Turcios surrendered his pesos and ran. Then, it was time to cross.

After his capture, the US Border Patrol officers took Turcios to a room with a table and two chairs. An officer accused him of being an adult; of running drugs across the border. Turcios told them he was 17, that he had never muled drugs, and that he had gone three days without sleep or food. He produced his birth certificate, which they took and never returned. A doctor arrived, checked his teeth, and confirmed his age. Then the officers stopped yelling, moved him to a cell full of boys his age or younger, and gave him two cookies and a bottle of Kool-Aid – the best meal he had eaten in weeks.

Two days later, he was given new clothes, a jacket for the cold, and told he was flying to New York. It was his first time on a plane, his first time seeing "ice fall from the sky", as it was snowing that day in New York City. After 26 days in a Long Island shelter, showering each morning and night, and attending a little school inside the facility, he was met by Henoch and Weigel, who drove down from Rhinebeck to collect him.

SIX MONTHS AFTER TURCIOS was detained outside his home in Rhinebeck, the campaign to help him had shifted from emergency response to sustained pressure. On a freezing Tuesday afternoon in January, more than 100 students walked out of Rhinebeck's middle and high schools as part of nationwide anti-ICE protests, defying district policies that required parental permission to leave campus.

My daughter, Scout, then 14, helped organise the walkout, and I watched from the edge of the park as she stood on a podium and told the crowd how ICE had taken a Rhinebeck High School alumnus who had done nothing but contribute to the community and how his detention had affected everyone.

Turcios has been shuffled between detention facilities across three states – New York, New Jersey and Louisiana – seemingly at random. Last August he was taken to the Alexandria Staging Facility in Louisiana, a factory for deportation flights. One morning he was led on to a plane bound for Honduras, but guards pulled him off just before departure after Copeland and other lawyers working on his case won a stay of removal. Over the next 48 hours, Turcios watched as 50 other migrants left the United States, before he was driven back to the detention facility.

In June Turcios had his second court hearing; unlike the first, this one he was required to attend. Dunne says he couldn't get out of his head the picture of this boy in ankle chains, flanked by guards, looking over at his friends and supporters in the public gallery. "And when he gave us a wave it was just heartbreaking."

It also brought up traumatic memories. Back in 1982, Dunne's younger sister, Dominique, died after being strangled by her ex-boyfriend. "The last time I was in a courtroom was over 40 years ago, representing my sister who had been murdered," he says. "I attended the trial every day … and every day felt like a situation where the system fails you. Seeing Gerson really, really shook me and I thought about things I hadn't thought about in a long time – that feeling of helplessness."

On 18 July 2026 Turcios had been in detention for a full year. His fundraiser has reached more than $130,000 in donations from 1,121 different people, but his legal fight continues. After nine years living in Rhinebeck, Henoch self-deported back to Honduras. He says that, given what was happening to Latino people in the US under the Trump administration, he decided it was better to return. "Having to start over here in Honduras is tough, but it has to be done," he tells me. Today he works on a cattle farm. Henoch's former girlfriend, Yorleny Weigel, still lives in Rhinebeck.

She misses Turcios. "I used to take him everywhere with me. People thought he was my son. I'd tell them he wasn't, but in the end I just gave up and went with it. He loved to go dancing; he'd try to dance but he wasn't very good." She talks to Turcios most nights on the phone. "He's changed," she says. "He doesn't want to admit it, but I think it's breaking him a little bit."

Today, now aged 24, Turcios is housed in the Metropolitan Detention Center in Brooklyn – the same building in which former Venezuelan president Nicolás Maduro and Luigi Mangione, accused of murdering UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson in New York City, are awaiting trial. Immigration detainees are kept separate, but are in the same facility.

Turcios says he's locked in his cell three times a day but allowed out for breakfast, lunch and dinner, and a few hours' recreation – playing cards, watching TV. "There are four telephones in the unit and we need to line up to use them," he says. "Sometimes there are eight people waiting and you don't get to make a call."

He says the food is bad – breakfast is a packet of milk and a muffin; lunch is pasta with meat that is "old or cold and flavourless"; dinner is mashed potato, spinach and occasionally chicken. "We don't see sunshine," he says. "There is a small room where we play basketball and there's a big opening like a cage, with no glass, and we can see a little piece of the sky." He speaks to his parents, Irma and Juan, once a week, but calls are expensive – $10 to call Honduras.

Turcios often thinks about how Trump campaigned on deporting all criminal undocumented immigrants. "But the criminals are on the outside," he says. "And inside, most of these people here with me just came to the United States to work, to try to build our lives and make things better."

He wants to return to his home in Rhinebeck. "I knew the community was full of incredible, nice people," Turcios says. "I never expected everyone would get together to help me out. I was so surprised and happy."

Turcios's lawyers are challenging his prolonged detention – under a supreme court ruling, the government may detain someone it wants to deport who has a final order of removal for 90 days; between 90 and 180 days, it must show special justification to keep holding them; and after 180 days, it must prove they are "wildly dangerous". Copeland says this is a level that even a history of gang-related homicide has in the past failed to meet. He argues that Turcios should have been released by October, roughly 90 days into his detention, and that ICE failed to properly notify him of a custody review hearing. In addition, Copeland is pursuing Turcios's claim for asylum in the US.

Meanwhile, Turcios's high school friend Anna Lawson, who recently graduated from McGill University in Canada and is taking a gap year before starting law school, is in disbelief that Turcios has been identified by her government as someone who doesn't belong here. "Gerson is someone who is a benefit to our community and has only enriched it and helped people. I think the American dream really does live in him. He is such an embodiment of what it's supposed to mean." ●

GET YOUR KIT ON

Lucy Law, Amy Smith and Sally Gulliford at a Zumba class in Bristol (above, from left to right)

From leggings that don't roll down to trainers that secure PBs, fitness fanatics share the sportswear they swear by
Words: Sarah Phillips
Portraits: Fabio De Paola

The Zumba dancers

When Sally Gulliford first plucked up the courage to start going to Zumba in Bristol in 2019 with her daughter, she didn't want to stand out. "I wore baggy clothes and stood at the back," says Gulliford, 57, who is a civil servant and lives in the village of Backwell near the city.

Amy Smith, who takes the class, reassured Gulliford that everyone would be focused on the instructor doing the moves at the front. The 38-year-old from Bristol had herself only recently regained the confidence to teach, and to wear tight-fitting workout clothes, having started leading classes after the birth of her two daughters. She decided her sessions would be held in a nightclub in the dark: "This creates an atmosphere where people not only feel like it's a party, which it should be, but lose their inhibitions more. It is like a girls' night out - we compare outfits and ask where things are from." The clothing choices of attendees reflect this disco atmosphere. "I wear bright colours now," Gulliford says. Her daughter still goes, too: "And borrows my gear."

"You want to completely submerge in the workout," says Lucy Law, 35, a psychological therapist from Yeovil, who has been going to classes since 2024. This is why the right attire is key: "You don't want to be worrying about your back fat or your side boobs, or anything rubbing."

With all the jiggling about, a sturdy bra is crucial; all the women agree that **M&S's Goodmove ultimate support non-wired sports bra** (worn by Smith and Gulliford, above centre and right, £30, marksandspencer.com) is the best. The zip-front design ensures "you're not going to fall out", Gulliford says. Law also rates the **F&F active zip-front high support sports bra** (seen on her above left, £18, tesco.com), "because it's so soft".

Gulliford says **Zumba Wear's mesh tops** (worn by Smith, above centre, from £39.52, zumbawear.eu) are popular to keep cool and **Halara's skorts and skort dresses** (worn by Law, above left, from £17.95, thehalara.co.uk) work well for bum-shaking. "You don't want something to feel like a wetsuit," Law says, "but you want it tight enough that it flows with your body. A massive one for me, especially with trousers or shorts, is rolling down at the top. I pull them up to suck the belly in and I don't want to be spending the workout pulling them up." **Gymshark's Light Hold Leggings** (£38, uk.gymshark.com) and **Matalan's Souluxe leggings** (from £12.50, matalan.co.uk) do the job: "They do not move on your tummy."

Dressing up for Zumba has helped the women to feel good about themselves. "It has definitely given me a lot more confidence in how I look at myself and what I wear," Gulliford says.

To find Amy Smith's online and in-person classes, follow her on Instagram at ZDP_Amy

The Guardian fashion desk recommends ...
Goodmove sports bra, £30, and skort, £30, both marksandspencer.com. Boxy mesh T-shirt, £33, adidas.co.uk. Power 7/8 gym leggings, £88, sweatybetty.com

Nico Junior, Habiba Hassan and André Lance of the Lost Culture running club in Leeds

The city runners

"I'm not going to lie and say that I don't feel the heat; I absolutely do," says Habiba Hassan, 26, of pounding the pavements of Leeds with the Lost Culture running club. "It can be quite difficult at times, especially when we are doing long distances, and in the summertime."

Hassan, an NHS dietitian who completed this year's London marathon, says that her running look has evolved as modest activewear has improved. "What was available five years ago is very different to now," Hassan says. "I'm not in a position where I have to wear a men's oversized T-shirt any more. There are brands that cater for me." Hassan sources breathable tops that are intentionally loose-fitting, such as her **Haya Active essential training top** (above centre, £39, haya-active.com). She is always being asked where she got her loose trousers: they are **Promover yoga trousers with pockets** (above centre, £27.99, amazon.co.uk).

The founder of the club, André Lance, 35, says that while they are an undeniably stylish group, participants are encouraged to prioritise more practical considerations when dressing for training sessions and races. He wears **Kiprun's 2 in 1 long-distance trail running shorts** (above left, £39.99, kiprun.com) - which have an inner layer "that feels like it stops chafing, which is a positive" - and an oversized, aerated T-shirt, along with basic running shades or a skullcap in winter.

Chafing is a concern for Hassan, too, especially as "where I chafe changes year on year". She finds "softer, buttery fabrics" are better. **Adidas's cushioned socks** (£8 for three pairs, adidas.co.uk) help on long runs.

The Guardian fashion desk recommends ...

Modest oversized tee, £38, uk.puma.com. Performance T, £75, on.com. Carpe Diem shorts, £38, freepeople.com. Merino socks, £21, sumsclub.co.uk

Nico Junior, 28, who works in tech and runs with the group, sings the praises of his **Coros Pace 4 GPS sport watch** (above left, £229, healf.com): "You can determine on a run whether you're doing too much and it helps you to pace yourself." Hassan has just moved from an Apple Watch to a **Garmin Forerunner 55 GPS** (£179.99, decathlon.co.uk), saying it is more tailored to running. Lance uses **JBL's Endurance Race 2 earbuds** (£59.99, uk.jbl.com), which "stay in my ear all the way"; Junior prefers **Beats By Dre's Powerbeats Pro 2** (£249.99, beatsbydre.com). They go around the ear and, he says, stop his head feeling heavy on long runs.

Vests are handy for trail runs and races, to carry gels and other items. Hassan loves the **Salomon Active Skin 4 running vest** (£95, salomon.com). "It has lots of zips, which are really good for your keys," Hassan says, "and deeper pockets for your phone. At the back, there is a really deep pocket if you want to carry extra layers or a coat. It distributes the weight, which is why I love it so much, because I found that belts hitting against your tummy can cause abdominal pain. It comes with soft water bottles that are like pouches."

They all save carbon-plated trainers for racing. "I wear **Puma Deviate Nitro 4 running shoes** (as does Junior, above left, £150, uk.puma.com) for training," Lance says, "as they are more centred on comfort and stability. For race day, **Adidas Adizero Adios Pro 4 shoes** (above right, £220,adidas.co.uk) have knocked minutes off my time. It feels like I've got magic powers."

Lost Culture running club meet in Leeds on a Tuesday, Wednesday and Sunday; instagram.com/lostculture.run

Manuela Campbell, Mackenzie Qu and Ailsa Mullins at Hot Girl Coaching in east London

The boxers

"The high you get from sparring is like nothing I've experienced before," says Mackenzie Qu, a 23-year-old from Hackney who works in retail, "and I've played a lot of sports." One of the downsides is that boxing involves a lot of gear, explains Qu, who took up the sport last October, signing up to Hot Girl Boxing in east London. "I've survived OK so far without a lot of it, but if I take it any more seriously, I'm going to have to invest in gloves at least." It is definitely worth borrowing gloves to start, says Ailsa Mullins, 34, the coach at Hot Girl, but you need to be "prepared for the stench of putting on gloves that 30 people sweated in before you!"

For Qu's first fight in November, they plan to wear Muay Thai-style shorts (with a high elastic waist and silky flared leg openings) with a bright yellow waistband, found at a branch of Traid. "I thrift most of the sportswear I own," Qu says, adding that Oxfam, Crisis and British Heart Foundation shops are the best for unearthing treasures.

Also preparing for the November fight is Manuela Campbell, 43, who lives in east London and works for a trade organisation. As the name of the club suggests, "I get really hot, so at this time of year I am usually in something sleeveless. If it's not sweltering, I prefer a baggy shirt: I don't want my top to ride up. I like to keep it loose, so there's a bit of airflow," she says.

Mullins wears a sports bra: "I like something with high coverage that's quite compact - anything that can push you in - because your chest is in the striking zone." She rates **Gymshark's Everyday seamless racerback sports bra** (£28, uk.gymshark.com), and Lululemon is another go-to brand.

Campbell is prepared to indulge in decent gloves - she just got new ones made by Rival - which last for around two years. "All the Hot Girls wear Rivals," Mullins says. "They are a really good entry-level glove." She recommends the **RV7 Fitness Plus bag gloves** (£54.99, rivalboxinguk.co.uk) she's wearing above left.

Having a good supply of wraps - worn under gloves for extra protection - is non-negotiable. "I stockpile wraps," says Campbell, who owns leopard-print Hot Girl-branded versions and **Meister's Semi-elastic hand wraps** (£7 a pair, meisterelite.com). Gum shields are also a must if sparring. Head guards are always worn in fights, but Campbell feels safer wearing them more generally: "My brother has been doing martial arts for years and I don't want my nose to look like his."

When it comes to footwear, Campbell and Mullins favour boxing boots. "If you're going to stick at it, get those first," Mullins says. "You can borrow most other things but your own pair of boots will make such a difference." **Adidas's Box Hog classic shoes** (above left and right, £60, adidas.co.uk) are her favourites.

The boxers all find the act of getting dressed to box inspiring: "There is something about the ritual of wrapping your hands before starting a session," Campbell says, "that makes you feel very powerful, and capable of a lot more than what people have told you. I was told from a very young age that I wasn't a sporty girl - turns out I'm actually quite athletic."

Hot Girl Boxing holds sessions in Hackney, east London, on Tuesdays and Saturdays; hotgirlcoaching.co.uk

The Guardian fashion desk recommends ...

Oversized T-shirt, £38, adanola.com. Classic SW amateur boxing shorts, £24.99, suziwong.co.uk. Everlast Pro Elite boxing boots, £99.99, sportsdirect.com. Energy top, £60, vuoriclothing.co.uk

Amanda Bowden, Seamus Bennett and Jenny Saltmarsh of the Swimscapes swimming club in Felixstowe

The sea swimmers

Amanda Bowden, 59, from Felixstowe, Suffolk, got into sea swimming on "a bit of a whim", when someone invited her to do it to mark her 50th birthday: "I lasted about seven minutes, then didn't do it again for a year." After getting the bug properly, though, Bowden signed up for a 6km swim and it took off from there.

There was one slight problem: she struggled to find swimwear "in colours and coverage that reflected how I wanted to present myself". As a sewing school owner, the obvious thing to do was to make her own swimsuit – using specialist material, sourceable from companies such as **Funki Fabrics** (funkifabrics.com). She wore it when she swam the Channel solo at the age of 56 – "It had a teal background with white polka dots and red crabs all over it" – and has made others since (above left). If buying a costume, she says, it's essential to try it out first: "Rotate your arms and move about in it. Bend over and see if your boobs come out. If you're an endurance swimmer, look for something lined, with well-finished edges. The more bands and straps there are, the more risk of chafing."

Bowden is part of the Swimscapes club in Felixstowe, as is Jenny Saltmarsh, 52, a health and safety consultant. Saltmarsh is a fan of **Funkita swimsuits** (funkita.co.uk), which come in fun patterns (like the one above right) and fit her well. In winter, she opts for a **Zone3Ti+ thermal high neck swimsuit** (£75, zone3.com). Neither swimmer wears a wetsuit: "Too much faff," Saltmarsh says, though, without one, Bowden laughs, "it can be a bit brutal".

Seamus Bennett, 61, a swimming coach and councillor who set up Swimscapes in 2012, wears an **Orca wetsuit** (above centre, from £149, orca.com), from March to June. He recommends a proper, flexible swimming one: "A general surfing or sailing suit may actually hinder you."

In summer, he likes **Funky Trunks' Jammers** (£39.95, funkytrunks.co.uk). He feels the cold in his hands, so wears **Lomo Tri-X neoprene gloves** (£21, lomo.co.uk), but avoids boots, which he says "slow you down".

There are safety concerns to swimming all year round. To help, Bowden uses "a highly visible tow float and a bright cap, so people can see me", while Saltmarsh wears **SurfEars 4.0 vented earplugs** (£54.95, surfears.com) to avoid surfer's ear, "bony growths, from cold water coming in". Bennett recommends **Garmin's epix Pro Gen 2 watch** (above centre, £739.99, hsamuel.co.uk), which he says has a better battery life than others, and Bowden favours Crocs for navigating the stony shore. As for goggles, Bennett wears **Arena Cobra Tri Mirror triathlon swipe goggles** (above centre, £68.99, arenasport.com), because "the anti-fog lasts a long time and they're really clear and comfortable". In open water, Saltmarsh wears "polarised **Zone3 Venator-X swim goggles** (above right, £35, zone3.com) and a "necessary evil" swimming cap – the brighter the better.

How do they feel about the divisive issue of changing robes? Saltmarsh says she loves her **Dryrobe** (above right, £175, dryrobe.com). "Everybody in my house has one – even the dog. My friends got me a badge: 'All dry robe, no knickers.'" Bowden, of course, made her own.

Swimscapes meet on Saturday and Sunday all year round, plus Monday May-Oct; facebook.com/FelixstoweSwimscapes

The Guardian fashion desk recommends ...

Vanquisher 3.0 mirror goggles, £29, speedo.com. Kaia 2mm Yulex swimsuit, £140, finisterre.com. Jammers, £55.99, swimcore.com. Long cuff swim gloves, £19.99, twobarefeet.co.uk

Wilf O'Donoghue, Lauren Briggs and George Barrett at the Alternative Movement gym in Thurrock, Essex

The weightlifters

Lauren Briggs, 30, from Thurrock in Essex, hadn't been to a gym before she lost both her legs after having sepsis in 2021. "I'd never done any sport before," says Briggs, who also lost her admin job in the aftermath of her illness. Now she goes to Alternative Movement, an adaptive gym five minutes from her home, four times a week for group and individual PT sessions. Briggs is able to deadlift more than her own weight, and has taken part in a triathlon and an adaptive competition.

"Being a bilateral amputee, I really overheat," she says. "Because I've lost two of my extremities, the heat doesn't dissipate; it all comes up through my body and head. I find that tight clothing insulates you more, so I try to wear airy clothes that don't cling to me too much." She opts for loose and light materials, and wears "quite a lot of **Adidas**" (such as the T-shirt above centre, adidas.co.uk) because she likes their sweat-proof material. Shorts work better than leggings with her prosthetic legs - she's a fan of these **Halara SoftlyZero Airy super high waisted 2-in-1 yoga shorts** (£19.95, thehalara.co.uk). "They've got tight shorts inside but they are still loose, so it's good for when you are getting up and down off the floor. Sometimes with baggy shorts, being female, I feel a bit exposed.

"I have very sweaty hands," Briggs adds, which can make lifting tricky, "so gloves do help. But I also use chalk, such as **Bear Grip's liquid chalk** (£8, beargrip.co.uk), because with the gloves, when you're sweating in them, it can sometimes cause friction and you get blisters. With the chalk, you don't."

The Guardian fashion desk recommends ...

Nakedfeel Origin yoga shorts (varying lengths), from £18, uk.crzyoga.com. Adaptive wireless bralette, £10, primark.com. Supernova Rise 3 adaptive running shoes, £130, adidas.co.uk. Inclusively sized slim fit cargo joggers, £34, next.co.uk

Another Alt Movement gym-goer, Wilf O'Donoghue, 17, who is a student, says he prefers sweat-proof T-shirts and elasticated shorts, and Uniqlo is his go-to: "It's affordable and easy to work out in." He likes these shorts (above left) and the **Dry-Ex T-shirt** (£19.90, uniqlo.com).

George Barrett, 24, believes having a uniform for the gym helps him to stick with it, as a person with autism spectrum disorder: "Comfort and routine is baked into our identity." **M&S shorts** (marksandspencer.com) and **Under Armour** vests (underarmour.co.uk) meet his sensory needs, and he uses **Sennheiser in-ear headphones** (above right, from £34.99, sennheiser-hearing.com) to cancel out any noise: "I mainly listen to music with a lot of power behind it." As for footwear, Barrett says his **Skechers Slip-ins trainers** (above right, £90, skechers.co.uk) are "loose and breathable".

Briggs has found the best gym shoes for her are **RAD's One V2** (£130, uk.rad-global.com), which she's wearing above and says are good all-rounders. "For weightlifting, I've realised that your footwear is crucial."

There are adaptive clothing ranges, including at Primark, but not all offer sportswear and most are on the pricey side, according to Briggs. "As soon as you market something as adaptive or for the disabled community, the prices do seem to hike up quite drastically," she says. "A lot of disabled people, we're not working, we're on benefits, and we're paying premium prices for something just to be able to live our day-to-day life - that's not really fair."

Alternative Movement offers a range of sessions at different times across the week at its gym in Grays, Thurrock, Essex; altmovement.co.uk

Simon 'Bob' Smith, John Moore and Chris Weatherston of the Brombay Bicycle Club in Wirral

The Sunday cyclists

In 2016, a group of friends from Bromborough, Wirral, signed up for the Liverpool-Chester-Liverpool bike ride. Most had not ridden much before, or not for a while, and their first training ride, which they were very proud of, was 11 miles. "We had mountain bikes and were wearing Aldi's best gear from the middle aisle," laughs John Moore, 62, who works at the University of Manchester.

After the race, they agreed they had enjoyed it so much, they would go for weekly Sunday rides around Cheshire and north Wales. "We used to look at road cyclists and say we're never going to be like them, we're never going to be Mamils [middle-aged men in Lycra]," Moore says. "But six months later, we all started. I suppose it's more aerodynamic." Simon "Bob" Smith, 61, who is retired, agrees: "There's no flapping." Chris Weatherston, also 61 and retired, thinks it's more comfortable. "Not to look at, admittedly," Moore adds.

Over a curry at Wirral Tandoori, Brombay Bicycle Club was born. One member, Garry Swaby, a graphic designer, came up with a concept for the club jersey, converting the Indian flag. The curry house even sponsored the kit. They got the design printed on a **L'Etape Jersey** (above centre, £50, provisionclothing.com). Quickly, bikes were upgraded and, inevitably, collections grew, turning it into an expensive hobby. "I've got six bikes," Smith admits. "I've got seven," Weatherston says.

Moore has just two and says he loves his **Giant TCR Advanced 2** (£2,299, giant-bicycles.com): "It's light, has a carbon fibre frame and handles really well." If you are starting out, go for a main brand and read reviews, Smith says, and take it for a test drive if the shop will allow you to, Weatherston suggests.

The Guardian fashion desk recommends ...

Sport jersey, £105, lecol.cc. Windproof vest, £90, santinicycling.com. Arm warmers, £45, castelli-cycling.com. Core cargo shorts, £120, rapha.cc

Padded cycle shorts are a must, with the group rating the **Castelli Endurance 4 Short** (£140, castelli-cycling.com) - "You can ride for hours in it," Smith says, adding that, when not in the club kit, "I like my **Castelli Climber's 3.0 SL2 Jersey** (above left, £88.49, all4cycling.com). It looks great, is lightweight and breathable, and has UV protection." As for helmets, Smith, who has "come off a couple of times", favours **Specialized's Align II** (£45, specialized.com).

Finding a decent saddle - the **SLR Boost TM Superflow** (£134.99, selleitalia.com) - for added comfort has been a gamechanger, Moore says, and his **Mavic shoes with cleats** (above centre, from £119, mavic.com) "make a massive difference". Smith gets "sore palms after a few hours", so needs **gloves** (above left, from £18, gripgrab.com), adding, "Glasses are important, not just to look cool, but to stop getting bits in your eyes." Moore has "Oakley sunglasses that are brilliant", the **RSLV 141s** (above centre, £188, oakley.com). The club's local bike shop, K Cycles, is their first port of call for kit and advice.

This summer, the club marked 10 years of cycling together by returning to do the Liverpool-Chester-Liverpool again, in memory of Chris Lewis, a member who died in June. They proudly wore the Brombay Bicycle kit. "Our dazzling apparel definitely gets noticed," Moore says. "At a time when flags can be divisive, it is great to wear something flag-based that gets such positive reactions."

Find a group near you at cyclinguk.org/local-groups ●

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CULTURE

Edinburgh special

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- Sketch duo Britney
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- Our top picks

TAKE IT FROM ME

Fringe favourites share their wisdom with eager festival newbies

Edinburgh special

How do you deal with nerves or bad reviews? What if you don't sell any tickets? For first-timers at the fringe, the list of potential worries is huge. So we paired a few up with veterans to talk past mistakes, coping strategies – and the odd celebrity encounter

Words: Rich Pelley

Portaits: Antonio Olmos; Styling: Sam Deaman

Duo lingo (Left) Frank Skinner and Cecily Hitchcock; (above) Stephen K Amos and Joe Pasquale; and (right) Ania Magliano and Ele McKenzie

HAIR AND MAKEUP: NEUSA NEVES USING CODE8 COSMETICS, BENEFIT EYEBROWS AND LASHIFY; FASHION ASSISTANT: CHARLOTTE GORNALL; COVER: FRANK SKINNER WEARS GIEVES & HAWKES SHIRT AND SUIT, ROKIT TIE AND TOM FOOLERY LONDON BROOCH; CECILY HITCHCOCK WEARS VIVIENNE WESTWOOD DRESS FROM MYTHERESA AND H.AZEEM LONDON NECKLACE; THIS PAGE: FRANK SKINNER WEARS GRESHAM BLAKE SUIT AND GIEVES & HAWKES SHIRT AND TIE; CECILY HITCHCOCK WEARS VIVIENNE WESTWOOD DRESS FROM MYTHERESA AND COEUR DE LION NECKLACE

EVERYONE HAS TO START somewhere – even at the Edinburgh festival fringe. But what made Smack the Pony actor Fiona Allen take up standup in her 50s? Why is veteran TV entertainer Joe Pasquale making his fringe debut in his 60s in an ensemble comic play? How many taboos will newcomer Sepideh Kaav, a Berlin-based Iranian comic in her early 30s, break by talking about sex? And what will the 78-year-old, seven-time Edinburgh veteran Gyles Brandreth make of debutant Brandy Bex, a 50-year-old NHS nurse performing in drag? We paired six fringe stalwarts with relative newcomers to compare their hopes, fears and survival tactics for this year.

Frank Skinner Five previous fringes & Cecily Hitchcock Fringe debut

The veteran Black Country comic, back with a new work-in-progress show, chats with the newcomer, whose 2000s-themed show is set to be silly for silly's sake

Frank Skinner My worry is that my first Edinburgh was so long ago – 1987 – that any advice I give will be archaic. I did it completely the wrong way. I went up with a play, was blown away by alternative comedy, then booked a venue for the following festival having never done standup. I wasn't even planning to practise until someone pointed out that I probably should.

Cecily Hitchcock Did it work?

FS My biggest audience was nine people. One day, nobody came at all. That's how people get their hearts broken at Edinburgh.

CH I wouldn't mind a couple of people, as long as they liked me. Is there anything I should avoid?

FS I'd say: "Don't read your reviews," but everyone likes talking about the bad ones. I got two reviews that year. They both essentially said: "This guy clearly doesn't know what he's doing," but insinuated: "He's got something." That was just enough crumbs to keep me going. Apparently, younger comedians are now obliged to have a theme or theatrical element. Someone like me, who just does jokes, is old-fashioned.

CH Since Fleabag everybody feels they need some tragedy. But it's not frowned upon to be silly. My show is silly for silliness's sake, although it does have a theme of nostalgia and childhood innocence.

FS Edinburgh used to feel like a folk festival. Anyone could turn up and do weird stuff. It's much more professional now. The first time a comedian handed me a business card, I thought: "If you'd done that in the 90s, you'd have been torn to pieces." The one word you couldn't use on the circuit in those days was "ambition". Now, people are very upfront about what can be gained from Edinburgh. I mean, this year, I'm doing work-in-progress, using Edinburgh in a way that it's previously used me. I'd be happy just doing work-in-progress for the rest of my life – 80 people in a room, just tinkering, trying new stuff. Even one line working is like receiving nectar from the gods.

CH How do you avoid going mad, surrounded by other comics for a month?

FS I used to have lots of "dressing-room friends", and stay out until 4am, even if I was drinking Vimto. But years of solo shows turn you into a lonelier, more desolate outsider. Having friends on the circuit helps. Thinking: "We're all in this together" is a good stabiliser.

CH The last time I went, everyone wanted to see the man who eats a kilogram of cheese. Do you still feel you're getting better?

FS I think I'm funnier than I've ever been. But I'm biased. Obviously.

Cecily Hitchcock: Family Recipe is at Pleasance Courtyard, to 30 August. Frank Skinner: Work in Progress runs to 16 August; Frank Skinner and Friends: Crowd Work, 17 to 26 August; both at Assembly George Square Studios.

Stephen K Amos 23 previous fringes & Joe Pasquale Fringe debut

The Edinburgh stalwart and the television, panto and variety veteran are appearing together in 11½ Angry Men, an ensemble spoof of the courtroom drama 12 Angry Men

Stephen K Amos Has Edinburgh never been on your radar before?

Joe Pasquale It's always been on my radar. I've just never been asked. There's always been this barrier between middle-of-the-road and alternative comedy.

SKA My first Edinburgh was in a package lineup in 1997. Back then, it was all about being discovered. Now the joy is the creativity: you're surrounded by comedians of all ages.

Joe Pasquale Before Covid, I'd almost

Edinburgh special

The fest of friends (Below) Fiona Allen and Sepideh Kaav; (right) Gregor Fisher and Susie McCabe; (far right) Gyles Brandreth and Brandy Bex

had enough of being on the road, stuck in traffic, eating crap. When the world disappeared for two years, I was just a bloke in his pants with nothing to do. Now I love younger comics' energy and ambition. How do youngsters cope nowadays? How can they afford it?

SKA They can't. Everything's gone through the roof. Edinburgh felt corporate-y even when I started. It feels even more corporate-y now.

JP I'm worried that I'm supposed to tap-dance. I phoned the director and said: "You do know I can't tap-dance?" He said: "What do you mean you can't tap-dance? You've been doing variety for 40 years!" I said: "I've never tap-danced in my life." He said: "Well, you've got four months to learn."

SKA Don't read reviews. If you believe the good ones, you've got to believe the bad ones. Did I have a good time? Did the audience? That's enough for me.

JP None of us are trying to get rediscovered, not at our age. I'm there for the experience of being on stage with you and the lads.

11½ Angry Men is at Pleasance EICC Pentland theatre to 22 August.

Ania Magliano Seven previous fringes & Ele McKenzie Fringe debut

The Edinburgh comedy award nominee and SNL UK host discusses pre-gig routines with the actor-comedian presenting her debut standup hour

Ele McKenzie My primary concern is that I won't sell any tickets, and no one will come. The idea of being reviewed terrifies me.

Ania Magliano You've got to have someone to throw under the bus as a scapegoat. That's what directors and producers are for. Being misunderstood by the public shivers my timbers. Having said that, I still have a Google Alert set for my own name, which completely goes against my Zen Buddhist state.

EM It must be incredibly reassuring knowing your dates are sold out.

AM Ticket sales are a useful anchor. The fringe is so abstract, scary and unknown. Deep down, we're all terrified of being exposed through our art. And it is art. It's tough on your body because you burn through so much energy, but you're fuelled by adrenaline.

EM What *do* you eat?

AM Last year, I stayed in a flat with an air fryer. I got into having a nice big egg frittata every morning and a banana before going on stage. The fringe is like managing depression: you need to remember basic self-care. A long shower can buy you an extra week of energy if you time it right.

EM What time are you on?

AM 1.25pm.

EM I'm envious that you can get up and get on with it. I'm on at 8.10pm, thinking: "How will I spend my days?" I usually have a pint or two before a gig, as an unhealthy pre-show ritual.

AM I used to be precious about my pre-show routine because I wanted control. I'd meditate for five minutes in the toilet, to get in the zone. The bottom line is trusting yourself to do a good show, whatever gets thrown at you.

EM I'm fully expecting to make plans - "I'm going to do this, I'm going to do that." Then it'll go to shit almost immediately.

AM It's surreal performing comedy 28 days in a row. Whatever you need to do to get through it is fine, even if that means having a chocolate brownie before every show. Hashtag: be kind to yourself.

Ele McKenzie: Bringing It All Back Home is at Pleasance Courtyard, to 30 August; Ania Magliano: Peach Fuzz is at Monkey Barrel, to 22 August.

'I've never tap-danced in my life. The director said: Well, you've four months to learn'

Fiona Allen One previous fringe & Sepideh Kaav Fringe debut

The Smack the Pony actor, who began standup in her 50s, talks about late starts and homesickness with the Berlin-based Iranian comic

Fiona Allen I've only done one solo show - three years ago. I was acting, having babies, but hadn't done standup. It was very much "mum on the run". This time, it has more of a theme, set over a single day, where I wake up dreading having to go to a party that evening.

‘I used to be precious before a show, meditating in the toilet to get in the zone’

Sepideh Kaav: That’s my struggle – do I need a theme? I already have one, as an Iranian woman in her early 30s. But there will be expectations.
FA People’s expectations can be whatever they like. There are thousands of shows at Edinburgh. It sounds trite, but you should just do you.
SK I am so scared of living away from home for a month. Do you get homesick?
FA I’m a total homebird. I miss my dog. Bring your home comforts, your favourite PJs. A month sounds like for ever, but you’ll suddenly be halfway through.
SK I mostly gig in Berlin, where I live. English is my second language, and words carry less emotional weight when they aren’t in your mother tongue. We don’t have a comfortable, everyday way of talking about sex, so discussing it in Farsi is very difficult. Speaking English makes everything easier. Few Iranian women do standup, and my comedy is quite dark. Even if I go to Edinburgh and fail, it might inspire somebody to think: “I can do better.”
FA I was 54 and thought: “I hope somebody else is sitting there at my age, going: ‘Well, she’s done it. Now I’m going to do it.’” Edinburgh is like a club full of open-armed, like-minded people, so you’re going to have a lovely time.
Sepideh Kaav: 1979 – Persianality Disorder is at Coco BoHo, 18 to 30 August; Fiona Allen: White Lies is at Gilded Balloon Teviot: Dining Room, to 29 August.

Susie McCabe Seven previous fringes & Gregor Fisher One previous fringe (45 years ago)

The Rab C Nesbitt actor was last at the fringe when it was barely recognisable to today. The Scots standup with seven runs behind her shares her wisdom
Gregor Fisher I haven’t done Edinburgh for 45 years. Back then, it was still church halls, not fancy venues that no fucker can afford. I did The Servant of Two Masters – a Scottish version of an Italian play – out of the back of a van. It was theatre for the people, funded by the government back when it cared about the arts.
Susie McCabe I’m just fortunate to play these lovely theatres every night.
GF It’s not because you’re fortunate. It’s because you’re good. If you’re crap, you don’t survive. Don’t hide your light under a bushel, Susie. I was iffy about coming back. My daughter said: “Well, you might have fun, Dad.” I thought I should do it one last time because, you know – tick-tock. I’d forgotten that I have to get there every day, which is a big ask for an old boy like me.
SM The fringe is a bit like gay equality in the 70s. We all wanted it to be slicker and better, but, once you’ve got it, you’ve lost a bit of what it was. The gay scene used to have this underground. Then we got equality and everybody’s like: “You don’t need to march any more.” I think the fringe is a bit like that. Having worked for a living, I hear comedians moaning: “This is my third gig of the day.” I think: “You’ve only worked half an hour!”
GF What was your job?
SM I was an electrician.
GF You’re the very person I need. I cannot get an electrician for love nor money.
Susie McCabe: Coming of Rage is at Assembly George Square: Gordon Aikman Theatre, to 30 August; An (Early) Evening With Gregor Fisher is at Gilded Balloon Teviot: Debating Hall, 15 to 30 August.

Gyles Brandreth Seven previous fringes & Brandy Bex Fringe debut

The veteran broadcaster, former Tory MP and raconteur imparts his wisdom on the NHS major-trauma nurse making her fringe debut as a drag comedy character
Gyles Brandreth I’ve been going to Edinburgh – alarmingly – since the 1950s. In the 90s, I was a Conservative member of parliament, but I lost my seat in 1997. My wife said: “You’ve got a clean slate. What do you most want to do in the world?” I said: “I want to be in a musical.” I had this brilliant idea – 100 musicals in 100 minutes. Then somebody said: “Go to Edinburgh,” and I was lucky enough to hit the jackpot. How long have you been a nurse?
Brandy Bex I qualified in 2009. I had a bit of an existential crisis when I turned 40, so I thought: “I’m going to create a comedy character and take the piss out of the NHS.”
GB Ha! So you’ve been taking the piss, just not in a specimen bottle. Two of my sisters were NHS nurses. One is 86 now. Where do you nurse?
BB Major trauma.
GB That can be your opening line. “By day, I work on major trauma. By night, I cause major trauma.” How are you on nerves? Do you take beta blockers?
BB No. I used to be quite nervous, now I truly enjoy it.
GB Well done, you! You and I may be the only people in Edinburgh not on drugs, prescription or otherwise.
BB I imagine in a year or two, I probably won’t be in the NHS.
GB The other thing I wondered is: where will you change into your costume? Wherever you change, it will not be private – a telephone booth, a lavatory, a stairwell. I was doing a Rocky Horror Show skit as part of my musical montage, and decided to change in the flat before I set off. Looking out of the window, I saw a guy with binoculars taking pictures of me. It was quite exciting. Ian McKellen came; afterwards we had a coffee. I was back in my jeans and T-shirt. He said: “I bet you’re still wearing your suspenders.” I said: “As it happens, Ian, I am. How did you guess?” He said: “Because I’m still wearing mine!”
Brandy Bex: Progress in Work is at Just the Tonic at Westside Rodeo, 23 to 27 August; Gyles Brandreth: Up Memory Lane! is at Assembly George Square: Gordon Aikman Theatre, to 30 August.

PÅL HANSEN; MARK MCGEE; ALEXANDRA CAMERON; REBECCA NEED-MENEAR; NATASHA PSZENICKI; OLIVER LOOK; GRAEME HUNTER PICTURES; ANDY HOLLINGWORTH; ANDY ROBINSON; BILL BLACKCREDIT; GETTY

Edinburgh special

Binge on the fringe

From big-name standups to Palestinian circus and a 'kinky Hamlet', *Kate Wyver* has the picks for an excellent Edinbugh

Ayo Adenekan: Homeland Insecurity
To 30 August, Monkey Barrel Comedy
Following his sell-out debut, Black Mediocrity, the Scottish comic and SNL writer is back with a "romantic hour" of finely observed comedy. Think summer romances, chased dreams and messy endings.

Ben Hart: The Labyrinth
To 30 August, Assembly George Square Gardens
The ever-surprising magic shows of Ben Hart (below) are always a fringe highlight. With skilful sleight of hand, mind reading and card trickery, he's good enough to win over any fool who thinks they don't like magic.

Campitalism: Three Gays Try to Fix the Economy
To 31 August, Pleasance Courtyard
Three financially illiterate LGBTQ+ people demystify finance in this drag-satire debut from BOY Theatre. There may be no money in the arts, but they're making art about money. Could be a camp equivalent of The Big Short.

Dee Allum: Raumdeuter
To 30 August, Pleasance Courtyard
Dee Allum tackles the World Cup and the trans experience in this follow up to her debut show

Deadname. What does it mean to cheer for England when it doesn't feel like you're getting anything back?

Demi Adejuyigbe Sells Out
To 30 August, Pleasance Dome
Last time he promised audiences one backflip. Now the skilled skit-comedian and writer on The Good Place (above) is ready with his next challenge to complete: becoming famous.

Kwami Odoom and Jack Henry: Support Group
To 31 August, Gilded Balloon Patter House
Kwami Odoom (fresh from Soho theatre's Tender) doesn't know how to be a dad. Jack Henry (multi-award-winner and nominee) doesn't know how to be "gay, sane and sexy at the same time". Will their hour of stand-up offer more clarity?

Lizzy Hoo – Says Hoo?
To 30 August, Assembly George Square Studios
Oversharing Australian

Lizzy Hoo (bottom, left) is at the fringe for the first time, thanks to winning a big Melbourne comedy prize. With her two-drinks-in storytelling, you'll feel like you're best buds by the end of the show.

Max Olesker: Making the Cut
To 30 August, Pleasance Dome
This theatre comedy is adapted from Olesker's memoir, which is about his realisation that he's not Jewish enough for the Orthodox woman he's fallen for. From one half of Max & Ivan, the brains behind Clash of the Comics.

Sanctuary
To 31 August, Pleasance Dome
Tracing the hard-fought effort to open an Aids hospice in 90s Suffolk, this time-twisting debut from the National Theatre's casting director Jacob Sparrow won the exciting new Leodis Prize for playwrighting.

Border Bodies
To 30 August, Assembly @ Dance Base
Part of the fringe's São Paulo Showcase, Border Bodies (above) features the Brazilian company TF Cia de Dança, whose show explores ideas of community and togetherness.

HAM
To 30 August, Summerhall
Fringe favourites Hotter Project (above) lied about their last show being their farewell. We'll forgive them as they return with this "kinky eco-hijacking" of Hamlet. Expect nudity, hijinks and weird feelings about your next ham sandwich.

Kirsty Mann: Corpse
To 30 August, Summerhall
Kirsty Mann bought a house – and it came with a ghost. Winner of the best theatre award at Adelaide fringe, this real-life one-woman comedy-horror is dark, funny, and deliciously disturbing.

The Plot
To 31 August, Summerhall
After a run of finely tuned fringe hits, writer-director Emma Howlett is back with a tale of radicalised young men and the stories we tell ourselves, as we dive into the foiled gunpowder plot of 1605.

Badgers
To 30 August, Traverse theatre
Made by the team behind the Bristol Old Vic's Outlier, Badgers questions our obsession with true crime. Writer-performer Malaika Kegode leads this shape-shifting show about folk tales, podcasts, and the art of letting go.

Shedinburgh
To 30 August, Shedinburgh
Maybe it's cheating to pick an entire lineup – but each show here is one night only. Head to the shed for bold new work from the likes of Sam Nicoresti, Inua Ellams, and The Femmes of Colo(u)r Comedy Club.

The Palestinian Circus: Step and a Half
To 29 August, Underbelly's Circus Hub on the Meadows
Blending Palestinian folk dance with contemporary circus, this swirling show (below) is a celebration of freedom, heritage and resilience. Presented in partnership with Medical Aid for Palestine.

GETTY; SARAH CINCH; GIULIA MCGAURAN; JONNY RUFF; ADRIANO ESCANHUELA PHOTOGRAPHY; HOLLY REVELL

My cultural awakening

‘A kids’ film taught me the power of delusion – and helped me chase my standup dreams’

As told to Olivia Ladanyi
Illustration: Martin O'Neill

I was 28 the first time I did standup. It was an open-mic competition where the audience decided the winner. As I held the tiny gold trophy, I decided to quit my job the next day. Some people might call that crazy, and it probably was. But I’d been honing that delusional self-belief since I was eight when I first watched the film adaptation of Frances Hodgson Burnett’s story, A Little Princess.

I already almost had the same name as its protagonist, Sara, a young girl who is sent off to boarding school while her father fights in the war. I wanted to be exactly like her. She was so sure of herself, and believed so completely in the worlds she created, that all the other girls at school wanted to be her friend. My favourite scene is the one where the girls sit on Sara’s bed, forming a circle round her as she tells fantastical stories. I would watch it and think: I want to tell stories that make people gather round me.

But unlike Sara, I was shy and making friends didn’t come easily. I did, however, understand how to use my inner world to escape my reality. My imagination became my most powerful asset. It’s why I told everyone the reason I didn’t get into S Club Juniors was because I would overshadow the other members, when the reality was that I couldn’t sing or dance and hadn’t even got through the first round of auditions.

“Don’t you ever do that? Believe in something just to make it seem real?” Sara says in the film. At the boarding school, Sara’s belief that she’s a princess – “All girls are! Even if they live in tiny old attics, even if they dress in rags, even if they aren’t pretty, or smart or young” – helps her to stand up against the cruel headteacher, Miss Minchin.

As a teenager, I wrote poems and short stories about boys I fancied, imagining they fancied me back. As an adult, I would fantasise about being anywhere else to escape my meaningless nine-to-five that largely involved sending emails. Those fantasies were a refusal to believe that this was my fate. It was as if by having them, I was preparing myself for a bigger, more exciting life.

As a standup comedian, delusion

You have to believe in what you’re doing, even after bombing in front of a stag do

is your greatest asset: you have to believe in what you’re doing more than anyone else. When it’s 2am and you’re at a service station on the M6 after bombing to a room full of stag dos, knowing you have to do it all again tomorrow, you tell yourself that it’s just one show, and you’re building towards something bigger.

Sara never loses her resolve. Even after everyone believes her father has died and left her penniless, and she’s forced to live in the attic as a servant girl, she still insists she’s a princess. One day, when Miss Minchin locks her in with no breakfast, lunch or dinner, Sara imagines a feast with candles and trays of good things to eat, and there, laid out in the morning, are platters of sausages, muffins and fresh fruit. Her imagination helps her to survive her reality until her fantasy becomes her reality. That’s the thing about delusion: you have to believe it’s real until it becomes real. Fantasy isn’t just escapism, it’s strategy.

I have been doing standup consistently for five years now. The longer you do it, the more you embrace failing: you don’t get better if you don’t bomb. You need delusion, resilience and persistence, the same qualities I admired in Sara all those years ago. You have to believe in your version of reality even when everything around you seems to prove the opposite.

Every time I do standup now, I want to feel exactly like Sara, enchanting her classmates at her boarding school. I didn’t realise until I rewatched A Little Princess as an adult that she’s not just a fantasist – she’s a standup comedian. **Sarah Roberts**

Sarah Roberts: Scary Movie 7 is at the Monkey Barrel 2, Edinburgh, to 30 August.

Did a cultural moment prompt you to make a major life change? Email us at cultural.awakening@theguardian.com

Edinburgh special

Hats off

Charly Clive and Ellen Robertson of sketch duo Britney have both achieved acting success in the US – so why are they so eager to get back to the fringe?

Words: Rachel Aroesti

There has always been a lot of overlap in the lives of Charly Clive and Ellen Robertson. After bonding on a school trip 20 years ago, the pair have spent the past decade performing sketch comedy together and were flatmates for almost as long.

But recently the similarities have bordered on the spooky. In December 2024, Clive was told she'd been cast as Steve Carell's daughter in the HBO campus comedy Rooster. Soon after, Robertson found out she was also getting a new superstar parent: she'd be playing Rachel Weisz daughter in Netflix's Vladimir, another smart show set at a US university. Both series debuted in March to glowing reviews and viewing figures in the millions.

"It was bonkers," says Robertson. Clive, however, maintains she was "very unsurprised" they'd both landed such high-profile gigs after years of small TV roles and near-breakthroughs (Clive led the Channel 4 OCD drama Pure in 2019). "I thought it was pretty inevitable, genuinely." Whenever Robertson fretted about their professional futures, Clive would assure her it was "happening, baby! Then, thank God, it did."

Despite having significantly upped their respective profiles, Clive and Robertson, both 33, are not abandoning their lo-fi sketch roots. This year, under their joint moniker Britney, they're taking a new show to the Edinburgh fringe (well, two actually: they'll spend their lunchtimes acting in a Robertson-penned play called Jitters, in which Clive plays her comedy partner's stepmum-to-be, and their evenings performing their latest sketch show Holy Mackerel!).

It's June when we meet, but the duo are in no rush to prepare for the festival: I saw a preview of Holy Mackerel! in February and it was pretty much flawless. Clive describes their shows as "meticulously prepared – so it's even sadder when it's not funny!"

That won't be an issue: Clive and Robertson have an incredible knack for finding hilarity in unexpected places. Their last Edinburgh show, 2022's Friends and Nothing More, managed to extract an impressive number of laughs from a banal Stephen King quote. This time around, they've transformed an inadvertently weird headline from the Guardian's TV section into one of the funniest sketches I've seen in years. I don't want to give too much away, but the designer Karl Lagerfeld and serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer both feature.

Occasionally, however, the pair's references can be a little too niche. They are considering dropping a sketch about B*Witched's 1998 chart-topper C'est la Vie. Older audiences don't get it, neither do younger ones: previewing it to a nonplussed gen Z crowd recently "was gutting", says Robertson. Both

REBECCA NEED-MENEAR; ALAMY; DEBBIE ELLIS

agree that in an ideal world they'd perform solely to millennial women. The intended vibe of a Britney show is: "I don't need to worry about the world, I can sit down and be taken care of by two year-aboves, who are gonna be nice to us for one hour," says Clive.

The pair first bonded at their Oxfordshire all-girls school in year nine, when they found themselves sitting together on a coach to the first world war battlefields of Ypres. They had never spoken before: Clive, who was bullied at school for "being gay" due to her cropped hairstyle (an attempt to get rid of recurring nits; she is straight), thought: "Ellen was very cool, she had really nice hair and boyfriends - which is so funny because she's the gayest woman in town."

By the time they arrived at their destination, they were firm friends - "laughing our heads off around Ypres". Back at school, they'd "just walk around doing funny voices to each other" at lunch. What did their classmates think of their comedy stylings? "It's hard to know. I think they were like: well, those guys are weird," says Robertson. Clive has a characteristically self-confident take: "I think they thought we were funny. We were a bit ahead of our time - I think people were jealous!"

Robertson went on to Cambridge, where she performed with the Footlights, while Clive studied drama in New York. After graduating, they began entertaining the idea of taking a sketch show to the fringe. Then Clive was diagnosed with a brain tumour.

Robertson suggested they base the show on the diagnosis because Clive was "being so funny about it", thinking it would also be a way to provide her friend with positive memories of an awful year. "And I said: absolutely not," says Clive. Eventually, she changed her mind; the resulting show, titled Britney - also the nickname they'd given Clive's tumour - was a word-of-mouth hit.

The following year, after initial surgery, Clive's tumour began growing again, meaning that she needed radiotherapy. The pair decided it was a good excuse to revive Britney, the show (now also the name of their double act), "slightly more lucratively" in London. It won the attention of the BBC, which

'Americans seem more interested in us ... Are we cheaper?'

Oops, they did it again
Britney, AKA Charly Clive (left) and Ellen Roberston

adapted it into a 2021 pilot co-starring My Parents Are Aliens' Tony Gardner, an early champion of the Edinburgh show. Making the pilot was "the most fun I've ever had", says Robertson. "We obviously really hoped they'd want it for a series. And then they didn't."

The rejection was "tricky and strange", partly because of the subject matter and partly because of all the gruelling promotion they'd done. "We had interview after interview with someone saying: so just tell us again about the worst period of your life," says Clive. Once they'd accepted it was going no further, "we were like OK. We did everything the way we wanted to do it. That goes to bed now."

UK TV's loss was ultimately the US's gain. Why do they think so many British actors are landing the sorts of roles in the US that have eluded them here? "Americans seem more interested in us for whatever reason ... are we cheaper?" wonders Robertson.

"Almost definitely - God, I'd do it for free. Don't print that," jokes Clive. Another possibility is the risk-averse nature of homegrown TV. While UK broadcasters are still trying to find the next Fleabag, in the US "they're like: 'How can we wow everybody again with something as successful as Fleabag, but that isn't Fleabag?'" says Clive.

Thanks to Vladimir and the already recommissioned Rooster - plus various other acting projects (Clive recently played Sally Phillips's sister in Relics at the Lyric Hammersmith; Robertson will appear in Caryl Churchill's Cloud 9 at the National Theatre in London from November) - Britney is now more of a passion project than something the pair are relying on for a career breakthrough. They don't covet online clout - in fact, they don't share any sketches on social media: Robertson thinks pumping out skits for Instagram would feel like "drudgery". They aren't particularly bothered about critical success, either. Some comedians have told them a positive review in a broadsheet can inflate the average age of the crowd "by, like, 40 years" - a disaster for the B*Witched material.

Instead, they want to ensure Britney always feels like a treat. "Because it's not the only thing we do, I think we're allowed for it to be a really special thing for us," says Clive.

"Working on a strange little hour of comedy is our dream," agrees Robertson. Twenty years on, the unadulterated joy of those year nine lunch breaks is clearly still going strong.
Holy Mackerel! is at the Pleasance Courtyard, Edinburgh, to 21 August.

HONEST PLAYLIST

Lucy Beaumont

As a tween, Hull's finest learned the rap from Waterfalls - now she blubs to prog. But which contemporary stadium stars make her carsick?

The first song I fell in love with
Caravan of Love by the Housemartins, when I was four or five. They're also from Hull, but I think I mainly liked it because my granny and grandad had a caravan in their garden that I used as a wendy house.

The first single I bought
I remember buying Thriller by Michael Jackson from HMV in Hull, even though it was before my time. Everyone loved Michael Jackson so I was probably copying somebody at school.

The song I inexplicably know every lyric to
I know the lyrics to loads of songs, but I actually sat down and learned the rap from Waterfalls by TLC when I was about 12.

The best song to play at a party
Superstition by Stevie Wonder.

The song I can no longer listen to
Anything by Coldplay - particularly Yellow. I have a visceral reaction. It's not them - Chris Martin seems like a nice guy - but there's something about the tone that makes me feel carsick.

The song I secretly like, but tell everybody I hate
Supermarket Flowers by Ed Sheeran. He wrote it about his grandmother dying, but from his mother's point of view. I think it's a really lovely song, but I'd never tell anybody.

The song that changed my life
As a teenager, I was really into hard house. Then, when I heard the first Stone Roses album, it was like nothing I'd heard before. The opening bars of Waterfall are especially rock'n'roll, but also feel so spiritual. It had a massive effect on me.

The song that gets me up in the morning
Movin' on Up by Primal Scream - perfect if I'm hungover and have a busy day.

The song that makes me cry
Wish You Were Here by Pink Floyd (below) has been played at a couple of funerals, and always gets me. I always think how amazing it must be to write something that people play at their most vulnerable moments, and that somehow explains life.

The song I do at karaoke
I've never done karaoke and I never will. But if someone put a gun to my head I'd do These Boots Are Made for Walkin' by Nancy Sinatra.

The song I want played at my funeral
At a funeral, you really listen to music as a group. So I'd have Try a Little Tenderness by Otis Redding.
As told to Rich Pelley

Lucy Beaumont tours the UK, 23 September to 20 June; tour starts Scunthorpe.

Out

Going out & Staying in

A cultural primer for the week ahead, whether you're high rolling or busy scrolling ...

Cinema

Love Me Tender
Out now
Vicky Krieps heads up Anna Cazenave Cambet's drama (above) about a woman who splits amicably from her husband to follow her dream of becoming a writer, but then falls for a woman – at which point, the ex-hubby files for sole custody of their child. Also starring Monia Chokri and Antoine Reinartz.

Edinburgh international film festival
Various venues, Edinburgh, Thursday to 19 August
The festival returns with a programme that includes 10 films competing for a £50K prize; plus the UK premieres of I Want Your Sex by Gregg Araki and Lance Hammer's Queen at Sea; and special guests including Kenneth Branagh, Ewan McGregor and Bruce Dern. There's also a screening and club-night celebration for Trainspotting's 30th anniversary.

Ice Cream Man
Out now
Eli Roth directs a slasher about an ice-cream man who turns children into homicidal maniacs. You're probably either in or out by this point but, in case it makes a difference, the film stars Ari Millen of Orphan Black fame as the titular dispenser of summer treats.

A Child of My Own
Out now
This docudrama is based on the real-life case of a Mexican woman who abducted a baby from the hospital where she worked as a nurse. Director Maite Alberdi's factual account is interwoven with a telling of the story from the perpetrator's point of view. *Catherine Bray*

Gigs

John Grant with Richard Hawley
Kelvingrove Bandstand, Glasgow, Monday
Originally brought together in 2023 as part of the Manchester international festival, Grant and Hawley reunite for this unique collaboration celebrating the work of late country star Patsy Cline. With Cline's songs steeped in romance and heartbreak, expect them to come to life anew on a Glasgow bandstand. *Michael Cragg*

The Galloping Cure
Festival theatre, Edinburgh, Sunday to Wednesday
This is the latest collaboration between Missy Mazzoli, one of the most successful composers working in opera today, and librettist Royce Vavrek, dubbed "the indie Hoffmannsthal". Its world premiere production by Scottish Opera is a musical must-see at this year's Edinburgh international festival. *Flora Willson*

Denys Baptiste, Gary Crosby, Cassie Kinoshi
Bristol Beacon: Lantern Hall, today
Joining the BBC's wider Proms season, this live-broadcast Radio 3 Bristol concert showcases successive generations of African-Caribbean jazz artists who have transformed the UK scene over the past half-century. *John Fordham*

Joji
Dublin, Tuesday; London, Thursday; touring to 16 August
The Japanese-Australian YouTube prankster turned serious musical artist (below) arrives in arenas in support of February's fourth album of ornate electronic ballads, Piss in the Wind. *MC*

Art

Kira Freije
Modern Art Oxford, to 16 August
It's your last chance to catch a clutch of exhibitions this week before they close, including strange, lifesize figures frozen in moments of emotional anguish created by Freije (work pictured above), who is nominated for this year's Turner prize.

New Contemporaries 26
Mima, Middlesbrough, to 16 August
There's no better place to spot the art stars of the future than the annual New Contemporaries exhibition, which brings together work by recent graduates and early-career artists.

Rachel Maclean: They've Got Your Eyes
Fact, Liverpool, to 16 August
This Scottish artist combines film and sculpture, fairytale and horror for a terrifying immersive exploration of AI and how it's tearing apart the idea of art and authorship.

Flare-Up
Goldsmith's Centre for Contemporary Art, London, to 16 August
Health and illness are the focus of this show about the body and disability, featuring a stellar lineup of artists including Derek Jarman, Félix González-Torres and Racheal Crowther. *Eddy Frankel*

In

Stage

Love's Labour's Lost and Much Ado About Nothing
Thomas's College, Richmond, to 22 August
This enticing Shakespearean double bill transforms his two comedies into a sweeping single love saga set around the second world war. *Miriam Gillinson*

A History of Paper
Pitlochry festival theatre, tomorrow to 19 September
Oliver Emanuel and Gareth Williams's new musical charts a burgeoning relationship between a man and woman through the scraps of paper they leave behind – tickets, letters, menus and shopping lists. Alan Cumming and Shirley Henderson star. *MG*

Kevin Bridges
Today to 20 February; tour starts York
The Glaswegian comic's relatable fare made him a standup institution in his homeland long ago. Now, more than two decades on from his debut, the (still only) 39-year-old heads back out on the road with new show Here If You Need Me. *Rachel Aroesti*

Tchaikovsky: Child of Glass
Opera Holland Park, London, Thursday, to 15 August
A music-dance-drama about the life and forbidden loves of composer Pyotr Tchaikovsky, written by Tama Matheson, with pianist Jayson Gillham playing live, and Royal Ballet soloist Téo Dubreuil performing. *Lyndsey Winship*

Streaming

Warren's Vortex
Now & Sky Comedy, Monday, 9pm
This sister show (above) to the New Zealand comedy Wellington Paranormal (itself a What We Do in the Shadows spin-off) sees a teenage girl fall into the transdimensional wormhole her dad has been hiding in his shed, leading the pair into a host of absurd alternate timelines.

Hit Point
U&Dave, Thursday, 9pm
Misfits creator Howard Overman's twisty romcom-thriller ramps up the standard-issue police procedural suspense with a hefty dose of sexual tension. Saffron Hocking and Nick Blood are two detectives trying not to get distracted by their mutual attraction while investigating a gangland robbery that doesn't quite add up.

A House Through Time
iPlayer & BBC Two, Thursday, 9pm
David Olusoga may not have made much of a traitor hunter, but the softly spoken historian is the perfect fit for this gently fascinating series which chronicles British life through the prism of a single dwelling. This sixth instalment focuses on an Edinburgh home that dates back to 1765.

Mourinho
Netflix, Tuesday
The Special One (a nickname he loudly disavows in the trailer while standing in front of a huge self-portrait) and his 20-year winning streak is the subject of this new series from Joe Pearlman, director of arch documentaries on Robbie Williams and Bros. Ferguson, Terry, Lampard, Ibrahimović and Drogba are among the talking heads. *RA*

Games

Agent 64
PC, out Tuesday
Aimed squarely at those who played and loved GoldenEye 007 on the Nintendo 64 nearly 30 years ago, this homage (above) keeps the lo-fi graphics and much-loved split-screen multiplayer mode but has its own story campaign and the ability to play online. Relive your youth – now with updated modern design.

Servant of the Lake
PC, out Thursday
Eye-catching for its charming mix of bold line-drawn characters and muted sketched backgrounds, this point-and-click adventure hs charming characters and hides a darker mystery. *Jordan Erica Webber*

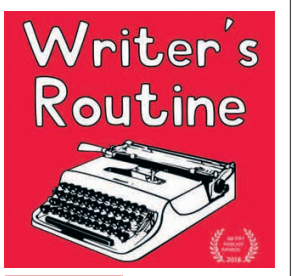
Albums

Overmono – Pure Devotion
Out now
Welsh brothers Tom and Ed Russell (above) continue to push the boundaries of electronic music on this follow-up to 2023's debut, Good Lies. As well as incorporating vintage synthesisers and destabilising vocal techniques, the pair also literally baked a crash cymbal in the oven. Why not?

Ravyn Lenae – Blue Island
Out now
Chicago singer-songwriter Lenae scored an unexpected smash last year with Love Me Not. As a result this third album should garner some attention, and thankfully songs such as the Solange-esque Saturday Night and the loping Handle live up to the hype.

The Anchoress – As We Once Were
Out now
Welsh polymath Catherine Anne Davies's first album of new material in five years. Her decadent art-rock is augmented by guests including Gwenno and James Dean Bradfield.

Flo – Therapy at the Club
Out now
The British R&B trio (below) return with the follow-up to their Grammy-nominated debut Access All Areas. Led by the salacious banger Leak It and the retro-soul stomper Remedied, the album also features throwback soul jams on the title track and Don't Break Her Heart. *MC*



Brain food

Writer's Routine
Podcast
Dan Simpson's long-running series finds nuggets of wisdom in writers' mercurial schedules. A treasure trove of advice for anyone looking to be creative, Simpson's bestselling guests explore how to build confidence and set your own pace.

Bayeuxmuseum.com
Online
As the Bayeux tapestry prepares to open to the public at London's British Museum, this interactive panorama from Normandy's Bayeux Museum allows those who can't get their hands on tickets to experience the next best thing.

Women Not Included: Drugs and Clinical Trials
BBC World Service, Monday, 8.30pm
Dr Ella Hubber's investigation into the ways women have been overlooked across decades of research is a troubling yet necessary listen. Alongside expert commentary, she explores how biological differences affect the ways drugs work. *Ammar Kalia*

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Edinburgh special

Astro futurism

Zambia's ambitions to join the 1960s space race were met with ridicule. Now, 60 years on, this curious episode is inspiring film-makers, playwrights and a circus show at the fringe

Words: JN Benjamin

In February 1960, Harold Macmillan, the UK's Conservative prime minister, gave his seminal "wind of change" address to the Parliament of South Africa in Cape Town, announcing the end of the age of colonial rule on the African continent. He had given the same speech in Ghana a month earlier but the South Africa speech received significantly more press attention because of its perceived confrontation with the Apartheid regime. The speech began a chain reaction: four years later, the British Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland was dissolved, establishing a newly independent Zambia.

Amid the hopeful energy of the nation's birth emerged Edward Mukuka Nkoloso, the father of the Zambia National Academy of Science, Space Research and Philosophy, with an announcement that the young country would officially join the space race.

Many thought this was a bizarre move – the competition for space primacy was originally part of a rivalry between the cold war superpowers. But now Zambia, in its infancy and without a fully functioning government, was not only set to join them; Nkoloso vowed to beat them into space and onto the moon. He was roundly ridiculed from all angles. Western media commentary took a particularly savage tone, calling the group "a bunch of crackpots".

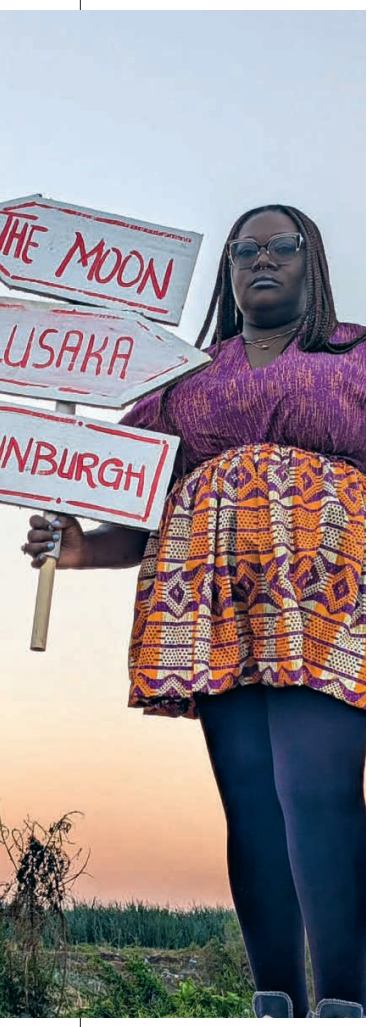
But Nkoloso was undeterred. He wrote an op-ed titled We're Going to Mars! With a Spacegirl, Two Cats and a Missionary, asked Unesco for a £7m grant, and continued work on his mission with 12 young men and women handpicked for his training programme. The curriculum was mostly delivered on a remote farm a few miles outside the capital city, Lusaka. It included swinging the "Afronauts", as they were so named, on ropes that were then cut as they reached their height, dunking them in rivers, and rolling them down hills in barrels.

There were at least some scientific principles behind the exercises: the rolling barrels had an effect similar to being in a centrifuge; the rope cutting was a crash course in freefalling, and the river dunks simulated a splashdown. "Some people think I'm crazy, but I'll be laughing the day I plant Zambia's flag on the moon," Nkoloso told reporters.

The space programme never did take off. Nkoloso's application for funding from Unesco was unsuccessful and requests for money from other countries went unanswered. Without financial resources, the idea was unsustainable. The negative press attention also affected morale – it was reported at the time that some of the trainees went on a drinking spree and never returned; 17-year-old Matha Mwambwa – Nkoloso's most promising recruit – became pregnant and returned home to raise the baby. The Zambian government formally distanced itself from the mission and the programme was eventually quietly abandoned, with Nkoloso pivoting to a career in politics.

In the years since, there has been some debate about whether or not the Zambian space mission was a genuine endeavour. In an interview with the Zambian-American writer and academic Namwali Serpell, Kenneth Kaunda – the first Zambian president and a close friend of Nkoloso – laughed when he was asked about the space mission. "It wasn't a real thing! He wasn't a scientist … it was more for fun than anything else," he told her. A common theory is that Nkoloso was satirising the absurdity of the United States and Soviet Union spending billions of dollars to go to

Moonage daydream
The cast, plus scenes from Circus Zambia and Wake the Beast's show Afronauts



space when the money could have been better used to solve problems on Earth. He probably knew he couldn't compete and his aim was actually to get the world talking about Zambia.

Whatever the truth, it is clear that Nkoloso's endeavours have made a significant impact on Zambia's space exploration ambitions. Last year the African Union formed the African Space Agency, with Zambia part of the group representing the south. And in 2024 the country completed a significant milestone in its journey to space by installing its first ground-receiving station. Nkoloso died in 1989, but the country is on its way to achieving his dream.

Despite its downfall, the Zambian space programme continues to influence artists the world over, particularly in the past decade or so. One of the most well-known interpretations of the Afronauts story is the science-fiction short film of that name by Ghanaian film-maker Nuotama Frances Bodomo, which premiered at the Sundance film festival in 2014. "I feel very connected to it as a Ghanaian," says Bodomo. "Edward Nkoloso's story is a Ghanaian one too. He's of the generation of soldiers who went abroad to fight in the second world war for the British Army, being promised land back, and when he returned he didn't get those things - that's also my grandfather's story. It's a Pan-African story of that time."

More recently, Company Christoph Winkler, a Germany-based dance theatre ensemble, produced a two-part short film series, respectively titled We're Going to Mars and We'll Unite the Galaxies. Filmed in Uganda and the US in 2021, part one celebrates the spirit of optimism that fuelled the space programme, while the follow-up imagines blackness unbound from a single planet, let alone a single continent, through a fever dream of space travel.

The fascination with the mission continues later this year as writer Ryan Calais Cameron teams up with director Monique Touko to deliver a "true-ish" take on the nation's defiant dream. Their production, The Afronauts, has its UK premiere at west London's Royal Court in November.

'I was excited to find a story that is Zambian. It felt just like raw material'

All these works use Nkoloso's vision of space exploration as a way to imagine beyond traditional western conceptions of what the future could look like, repositioning black Africans as leaders and trailblazers. In many ways, Nkoloso was an early - though perhaps largely forgotten - pioneer of Afrofuturism, a term coined in the 90s by cultural critic Mark Dery.

While there has been considerable attention from outside the country, it's clear that these historic events mean a great deal to Zambians, too. This month Circus Zambia, a Lusaka-based social enterprise that offers circus- and life-skills training to young people from marginalised backgrounds, brings its show Afronauts to the Underbelly at Edinburgh festival fringe. The production is a collaboration with UK-based theatre company Wake the Beast, co-founded by the Irish theatremaker Adam McGuigan, and combines aerials, juggling and partner acrobatics to share this epic piece of African history.

The partnership between the two companies goes back many years. McGuigan - who previously lived in Zambia for a decade and still regularly works within the country's theatre industry - also co-founded Barefeet Theatre, a cultural movement which seeks to empower vulnerable children living on the streets of Lusaka through theatre workshops. It was through this programme that he met a young Gift Chansa, who would eventually go on to co-create Circus Zambia. The two of them co-direct the Underbelly production, which also appeared at the Wilderness and Latitude festivals in July.

"We started working on the show in 2019 and were planning to bring it to Edinburgh that year, then Covid came," Chansa tells me during a break from rehearsals. Before that, most of its shows were adaptations of well-known western works. "I was excited I found something that is Zambian," he says. "It felt just like raw material, nobody had done a theatre production of it at that time. We are Zambians who are pushing the Zambian narrative with something that feels authentically Zambian - made for Zambia, by Zambia. We call that Zambia Ku Chalo." A saying that literally translates as "Zambia to the world".

Circus Zambia performs Afronauts at the Underbelly, Edinburgh, to 31 August; touring the UK and Ireland to 12 September; tour starts Liverpool.

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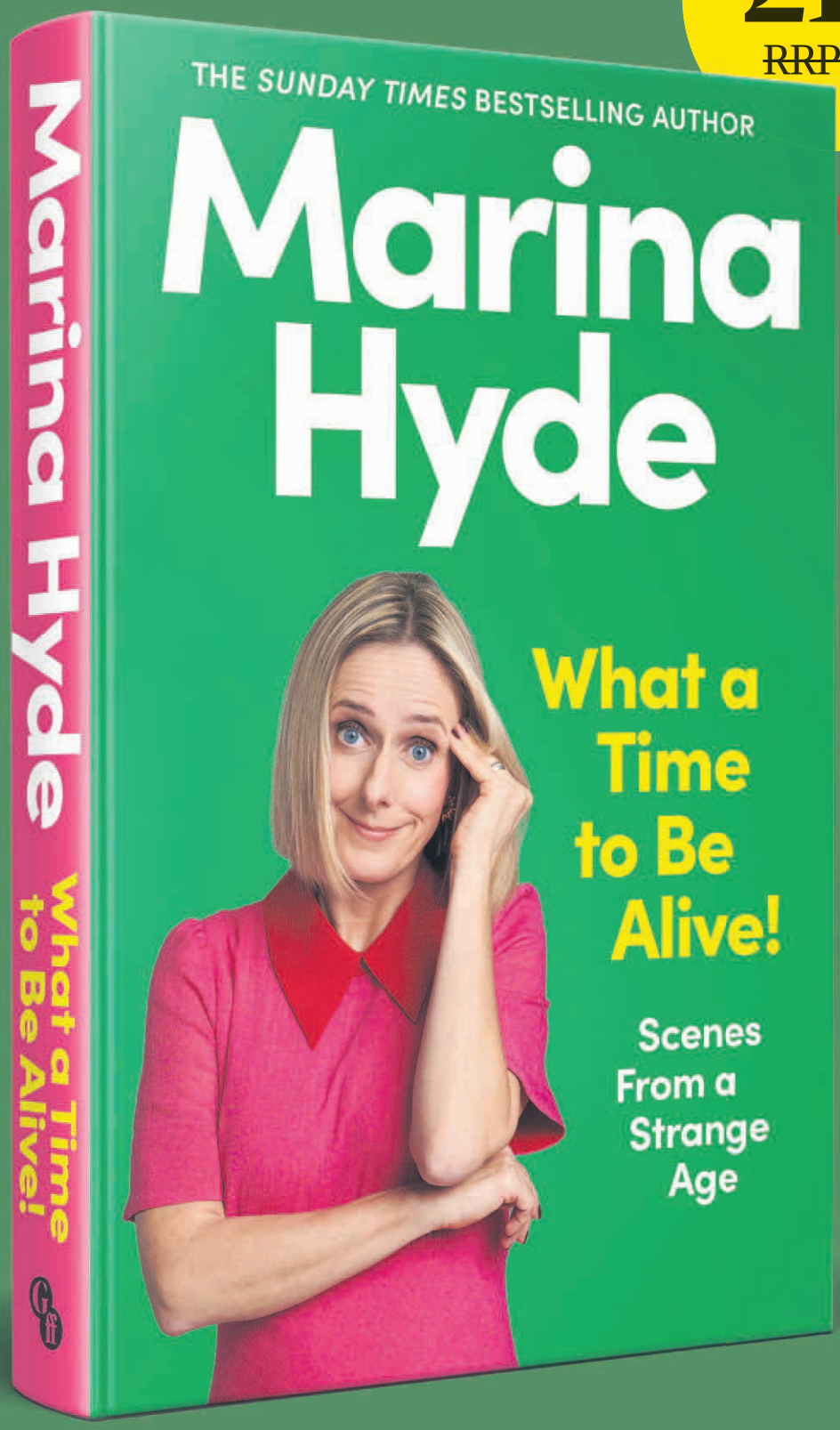

Truly, these are times that make you want to put your hands over your eyes, even when your hands are already over your eyes. The only thing to do is read Marina Hyde and howl with laughter

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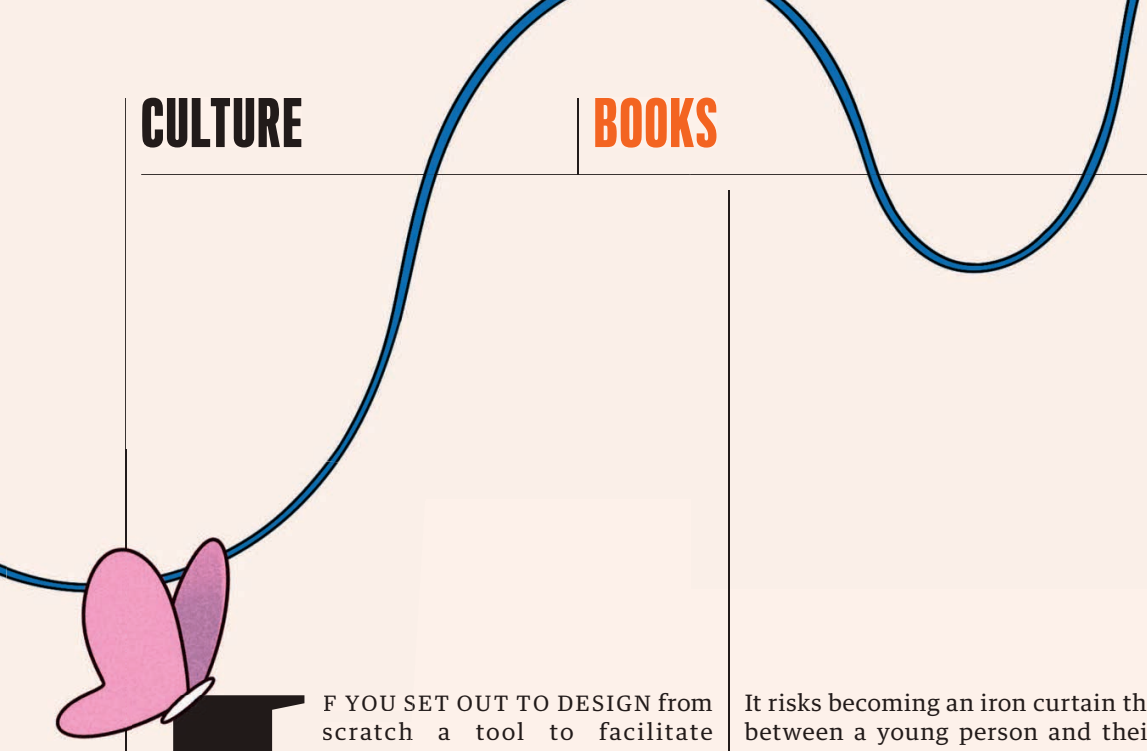
BOOKS

ESSAYS, FICTION *and* NONFICTION REVIEWS

Mind games

Education is at a crossroads, argues author and academic *Katherine Rundell*. Should we allow AI to infiltrate our schools and universities, or is it time to fight back?



IF YOU SET OUT TO DESIGN from scratch a tool to facilitate authoritarian rule, it would look exactly like AI. You would cherish it for its ability to destabilise our shared reality and its creation of disinformation on a scale unprecedented in human history. With it you need no armies of typists and artists to spread your propaganda. It can enable mass surveillance and thereby put shackles on those who seek to resist you. Its lethal autonomous weapons systems can perfect and normalise remote killing. It will turbocharge inequality; it is already facilitating a breathtaking shift of power and wealth from the hands of the many to the hands of a tiny number of men who – to put it in terms for which I can't be sued – seem to hold dangerously damaged views about the value and dignity of human life.

AI could be a magnificent thing. It could revolutionise medicine, speed the cure of cancer, assist disabled people, transform the way we are able to understand data, democratise access to the law, bolster disaster early warning systems and uncover hitherto unimagined truths about the Earth's ecosystems. But if it ends up in the hands of crooks and despots that will be completely irrelevant.

Most of all, if you were a would-be autocrat, you would love the way that large language models (LLMs) such as ChatGPT, Claude and Google's Gemini have thrown a grenade into thousands of years of teaching and learning: the way they threaten to upend our ability to think with the robust clarity that is needed in emergencies of justice. I write fiction for children and I hold a fellowship at Oxford University, so I spend a lot of time working with, and for, young people. I've seen first-hand the way that generative AI has already infiltrated young people's lives. I've seen, at the same time, how it has thrown stark and urgent light on how fundamental books and reading are to our shared understanding of who we are, and to our democracy.

There are many things I hate unequivocally about AI. I hate that it can make counterfeit people; computer-generated humans that risk destabilising our entire civilisation. I hate that much of AI's LLMs were built on an illegal pillage of human labour. I hate the environmental catastrophe that AI brings with it: the yearly electrical demand of AI-optimised data centres is predicted, by the end of this decade, to exceed that of the whole of Japan. I hate that it may be the factor that tips the Earth's ecosystems into irreparable chaos.

And I hate what it is doing to the minds, and the happiness, of the young. Going into schools, I meet thousands of children a year and every day I become more certain that, if justice for all is to be our organising principle, AI is not for children and not for young people. It risks becoming an iron curtain that comes down between a young person and their potential for thinking, for experiment and conquering frustration, for stamina and for invention – and thereby, between the young people and their freedom. It risks halting learning before it can take flight.

Studies show, over and over, that when we engage in AI-assisted learning we give up sooner. One found that after just "10 minutes of AI-assisted problem-solving, people who lost access to the AI performed worse and gave up more frequently than those who never used it". An MIT study showed that test groups who used ChatGPT had the lowest brain activity and "consistently underperformed at neural, linguistic, and behavioural levels". We undergo not just cognitive offloading, but cognitive surrender: we forget what was possible.

Children, we have known for a long time, take deeper meaning from text on paper than on screen, in part because we're tactile creatures and the brain is also of the body; but we are now living through a surge of ed tech driving learning increasingly online, such that my teenage goddaughter tells me that almost every single member of her class is using ChatGPT to do their homework. More, the work they produce in AI's greasy little fluent voice is often mistaken by young people themselves for their own mastery. If the work a child produces is no longer an indicator of their understanding, we have put them in a situation that makes them vulnerable to their desire for speed and to their anxiety about looking stupid; we risk becoming the unwitting thieves of our children's intellectual clarity.

Those who work in ed tech promise that it will liberate teachers and create one-to-one learning experiences for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Certainly, AI teaching will be cheaper than teaching assistants. But we know that the second it becomes possible for an institution to achieve an end cheaply – even if it's far worse – there is immense pressure from above to do so. I think it's more likely that the rich schools will follow the lead of Sweden, which has taken a strong swerve towards non-tech-based learning, and Norway, which just all but banned AI in elementary classrooms – while poorer schools are left to make ever-greater use of LLM technology.

AI, we're told, will make learning more efficient. But is that what we dream of for our kids – an efficient childhood?

AI, we're told, will make learning more efficient. But is that what we dream of for our kids – an efficient childhood? To write an efficient story, sing an efficient song? An adequate teacher is not only teaching about Henry VIII; they're teaching your child how to read a human character. A good teacher is showing them how to shape an argument, how to command an audience, how to tell jokes, how to pass on knowledge. A great teacher is showing your child what it is to love. They are teaching your child how to be human. A computer will only teach your child how to be a computer.

At its most bleak, constant interaction with humanised tech risks killing children. The idea of a vulnerable adolescent holding what feels like a conversation with a computer's sycophantic, confident, almost-human voice fills me with dread. Sewell Setzer III was 14 when he died by suicide, encouraged by the chatbot to which he was obsessively typing, which told him: "come home to me".

The most obvious objection to my loathing of AI in the classroom and in childhood is this: AI is coming, and they need to learn how to use it or be left behind. But the tech of today looks nothing like it will in five or even two years' time: it's the equivalent of selling your child's intellectual liberty in exchange for a penny-farthing bicycle. I asked a contact who is the president of a billion-dollar tech enterprise, what would you teach your sons? He said he wouldn't teach his children to use AI, because it will prepare them for nothing. He would teach them the humanities. Teach them who we are, who we have been, what we can make. The FT's Gillian Tett reported that a senior financier's New York firm now seeks out humanities students, because "AI-native" Stem graduates are entering the job market with "alarmingly shallow ideas".

At the university level, teaching staff across the country were already feeling the extraordinary impact of the ubiquity of a decade of smartphones on the brilliant young developing mind. Students were already arriving having read dramatically fewer books, less able to parse complex text; and now the advent of LLMs has changed everything. It has always been the case, of course, that students don't do all the work they're assigned. I absolutely didn't. But this is different. It was always very possible to write an essay about Paradise Lost without having read Paradise Lost. This is the first time it is possible to create an essay about Paradise Lost without having read the essay you just "wrote". This is the first time in history that sentences do not need to have humans behind them.

Professor Paul Musgrave of Georgetown University writes in his Substack Systematic Hatreds: "One could, in general, rely on many to most students to attempt to read many to most pages of many to most assignments – and to understand a like proportion of what they have read. In smaller courses, the difference in the quality

GETTY IMAGES

Illustration: Mojo Wang

‘Friends say they can tell when their students are handing in AI-generated work – I think we can’t’

of course discussion where 70% of the students have done 50% of the readings and one in which 20% have done 10% of the readings is obvious in the same way that a cold Coke tastes different than lukewarm spit. The former is no chablis, but it is more palatable.”

Many students want to resist, but the temptation is great, and some start to feel they’re being penalised for their honesty. I tell the students I meet: imagine you’re an Olympic athlete. You set out to sprint the 3km across London, from Clapham to Balham. You know if you take the bus, it will be faster. But you also know that the point was never being in Clapham or Balham; they’re very similar: they both have a nice Pizza Express. It was the strength you built, the speed and knowledge of your body that you gained. A student’s essay on Macbeth has no value as a *product*. It’s what you learned in the reading and writing that created it – the swiftness and resilience and suppleness of thinking you built, along with the knowledge gained of a literary marvel, of something quicksilver and unsummarisable – that was the point. So you can’t collaborate with AI in the same way you can’t collaborate with a bus. And you cannot learn to think without a climbing frame of facts and ideas and texts to move around in.

But we can no longer guarantee that the work students give us is the product of their own minds. Friends at universities around the UK optimistically tell me that they can tell when their students are handing in AI-generated work. But I think we can’t, not from written work alone; for myself, I’m only sure that I can tell when a young person is using AI *badly*. A friend who teaches maths at a London university told me his students are handing in essays without deleting AI’s jaunty “Happy to help!” at the start. You don’t have to be Sherlock Holmes. But I think an AI essay edited over the course of a day could pass as original, and, in a world in which young people are under extraordinary stress, we should not be shocked if many gave in to that temptation. My colleagues in academia – particularly those in law, where a lack of genuine understanding is catastrophic for justice, and philosophy and English, where the irreducible text itself is the thing – are full of fury at the inertia of our political class. MPs have been largely silent on the threat to our capacity to think independently, boldly and confidently – which is, ultimately, a threat to democracy.

What is the answer? I don’t think the commonly suggested solutions of spoken vivas and weekly exams can be the sole answer in the humanities, because the essay isn’t an arbitrary method of testing or certification: it is a hundreds-of-years-old method of *thinking*. To write is not just to transcribe the mind’s ideas; it’s a form of transformation, turning a nascent, half-built thought into something sturdier, tougher, sharper. EM Forster wrote: “How do I know what I think until I see what I say?”

I do not know what the answer is, but I do know that it’s not to give up. The young mind is a spectacular thing. To waste its beauty and strength would be a dereliction of the trust the young are asked to put in the old. To wrap AI into the art of learning when we have overwhelming proof of the harm it does to developing minds is feeding snake oil to the people we should cherish most. We already have counterfeit AI people infiltrating our media: we must not risk sending out young people into a hard world armed only with counterfeit knowledge. We should treat it with the same urgency with which we would treat a wildfire.

I asked the president of a billion-dollar tech enterprise, what would you teach your sons? He said: ‘the humanities’

There are many young people who are furious at the influx of AI slop and tech chaos into their lives, who have asked me over the last year, *how do we resist*? I tell them that I think, for the young, knowledge and imagination are together the first site of resistance. And that by reading books (and talking about what they have loved reading so that it becomes a community, rather than purely private, act) they can begin their fight.

I talk a great deal about reading for pleasure; I’ve written elsewhere about the necessity of pleasure in the classroom, and why it is not an optional extra but the hallmark of true education. We must find ways to show children that reading gives you access to an inexhaustible source of delight. But I worry, too, that we are limiting the meaning of the word pleasure. Learning is a strange and discomfiting experience; it’s a struggle and a frustration, and epiphanies are rare. It is not always pleasure in its easiest sense.

So I think we also need to talk to young people about reading to outrun and outfight injustice. Reading to get faster, swifter and tougher; to develop powers of scrutiny and criticism and huge creative imagination. Reading human work to insist that we are human. Reading for liberation and emancipation; reading for intellectual freedom, and to have the strength to fight in the arenas of the mind, because when we let a computer think for us, we put a gun to the head of civilisation.

There are dark days ahead. If we are to fight against those with untold financial wealth, we will need untold intellectual wealth. We will need tough-minded people; people with stamina, a huge range of knowledge, and an ability to see wide and far enough to understand in real time what is being done to us. Reading for pleasure and delight are vital – but alongside that and even more urgently: reading for power.

Napoleon’s Orangutan: A Collection of Miraculous Creatures by Katherine Rundell will be published by Faber in October.

A soldier in Red Square, Moscow, during the attempted coup in 1991

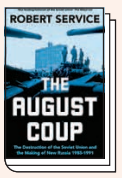
Things fall apart

A magisterial account of the chaos and absurdity of a collapsing USSR

John Simpson

HISTORY

The August Coup
The Destruction of the Soviet Union and the Making of New Russia 1985-1991
Robert Service
PICADOR, £30



MARXIST-LENINIST rule in Russia lasted 74 years, and in August 1991 it effectively collapsed in just three days: clear evidence of how hollowed out it had become. In the period that followed, Russia tried parliamentary democracy and unalloyed capitalism, then sank back into autocracy. Now it's struggling under a wholly unnecessary war against its neighbour and former possession, Ukraine.

Why did the system of Lenin, Stalin, Khrushchev and Brezhnev vanish so fast, without a fight? Because that's how regimes fall in Russia: look at tsarism in 1917. (It almost happened again in June 2023, when the warlord Yevgeny Prigozhin's men marched on Moscow largely unopposed; Vladimir Putin might have gone the way of Nicholas II had he not made some pretty wholesale promises to Prigozhin, then allegedly blown him up two months later.)

Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in 1985 with the intention of saving the USSR. Instead, he oversaw its death. He was a charming, decent man but no visionary, and the two medicines he brought to the patient's bedside, *perestroika* (restructuring) and *glasnost* (openness), proved to be wholly ineffective. The brief coup of August 1991 against him, headed by Vladimir Kryuchkov, the boss of the KGB, was the kneejerk response of a bureaucracy that knew things were going wrong but had absolutely no idea what to do about it. It failed quickly, and Gorbachev was back at his desk within days, but the coup had damaged him fatally. Four months later, at the end of 1991, he was bundled out of power by the tough, brutal, boozy *muzhik,* Boris Yeltsin.

Robert Service, author of The August Coup, is the English-speaking world's foremost historian of 20th-century Russia and Bolshevism. His biographies of the three major Soviet leaders, Lenin, Stalin and Trotsky, are outstanding, even in that crowded field. In writing about the death of the system that these prodigies and monsters helped to create, Service has displayed a remarkable grasp of the vast sources, and a delightfully clear writing style which makes even the complexities of Soviet bureaucracy easy to understand. Compared with his earlier subjects, the story of the coup against Gorbachev and the collapse of the USSR is moderately simple; but Service guides the reader through the chaos of the collapsing system and the machinations of the coup leaders with ease and grace.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 and the loss of the various Soviet satrapies in eastern and central Europe, the USSR was falling apart, and Gorbachev, as its president, was shedding power and influence. No one knew how many Soviet republics would break away, and Gorbachev's plan for running the rump of the union was bitterly contested. Yeltsin was the president of the Russian Republic, the largest, richest and most effective part of the old USSR. The two men were in angry contention. The coup leaders didn't support either of them: they wanted to go back to a system which would restore as much Soviet power as possible. The assumption at the time was that the KGB had led the coup to protect its own interests, but Service demonstrates that Kryuchkov, the KGB boss, was much more concerned about the overall collapse of the Soviet system. And anyway, many KGB officers refused to join the coup.

I was lucky enough to be in Moscow during those extraordinary days. Service captures the ludicrousness of it all beautifully. The coup leaders lost their faith in what they were doing almost immediately, and many of them didn't have much to begin with. They argued, betrayed each other, or were paralysed by fear or torpor. Most of the people involved left some account of what happened, so the records available to Service were particularly rich. He provides us with a graphic description of the fatal press conference that the plotters gave at 5pm on the first day of the coup. The acting president, Gennady Yanayev, was supposedly in charge, but he had been drinking solidly for an entire day and his hands were visibly shaking. The press conference was broadcast live on state television, so everyone could see the condition he was in. After that, failure was certain.

The basic reason it collapsed, though, was that the plotters didn't manage to get hold of Yeltsin. It was easy enough to imprison Gorbachev at his palatial residence, Zarya, on the Crimean coast, where he was holidaying with his wife Raisa and their daughter; but Yeltsin remained free, and had use of the Russian republic's Moscow headquarters, known as the White House. You might expect communist plotters to be good at cutting communications and taking over the media, but no one stopped Yeltsin from phoning allies and friends around

PETER TURNLEY/GETTY IMAGES; EDO SCHMIDT/ALAMY

Russia and across the world. Nor did they try to prevent him making his famous speech from a tank in front of the White House, condemning the coup and pledging to support democracy. It was a good speech, and the television coverage of it was seen worldwide. Again, no one pulled the plugs. Journalists like me were able to broadcast live throughout the coup. Yeltsin stayed inside the White House, mostly protected by a small crowd of unarmed demonstrators whose numbers dropped as the first night wore on and the rain came down.

Yet Yeltsin suffered from the same weaknesses as many of the plotters. In the lobby of the White House I begged to be allowed to go up to his office and interview him, but was told he was too busy speaking to world leaders and organising the opposition. Later, the former Soviet foreign minister Eduard Shevardnadze arrived to see him. When he came out of the building an hour afterwards, he announced that Yeltsin had told him he would defend Russia's freedom to the last drop of blood in his body. Stirring stuff. Three years later I reminisced with Shevardnadze about it all. He laughed. "When I got into Yeltsin's office, he was lying unconscious on the floor with a couple of empty vodka bottles beside him." But what about him fighting to his last drop of blood? "What do you think would have happened if I'd come out and told you I couldn't speak to Yeltsin because he was dead drunk?"

Such was the chaos and absurdity surrounding the death of the Soviet Union. In the days that followed no one had any idea where authority lay. We tend to forget the details of this pivotal episode. Perhaps Russia's troubled history since 1991 has wiped them from our memories. Now Service has brought his magnificent grasp of Soviet history to the task of chronicling the ludicrous way it ended: not with a bang, but with the clink of vodka bottles.

John Simpson is the BBC's world affairs editor. His programme, Unspun World, returns to BBC Two in September. To buy a copy of The August Coup by Robert Service for £27 go to guardianbookshop.com

A snow leopard

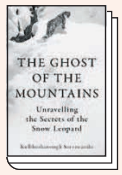
Paws for thought

A myth-busting study of the snow leopard

Edward Posnett

NATURE

The Ghost of the Mountains
Unravelling the Secrets of the Snow Leopard
Kulbhushansingh Suryawanshi
GRANTA, £20



When bored, try the following game – I call it "Purr or Roar?". Take any feline and guess whether it can purr or roar (it cannot do both because purring and roaring require different anatomical structures). Some candidates are easy: any child knows that lions and tigers roar and that a tabby does not. But between the great cats and our pets are numerous other species, from lynxes to panthers, whose anatomy is not so easy to infer. A leopard, for instance? Roar (or growl). The discreet, mountain-dwelling snow leopard? Purr.

The latter is the protagonist of Kulbhushansingh Suryawanshi's first book, a compelling and intimate look at an elusive mountain specialist. A conservationist and mountaineer, Suryawanshi pursues the creature through the Himalayas and Gobi desert. This is a gritty and detailed portrait of an often misunderstood and endangered species in an increasingly hostile, crowded and hot environment.

Suryawanshi grew up in Aurangabad in the Deccan Peninsula – far away from the snow leopard's habitat – and decided to pursue ecology after reading biologist George Schaller's The Year of the Gorilla in the city's public library. He writes of his admiration for western conservationists, mountaineers and explorers – Schaller, Reinhold Messner, and British imperial adventurer Francis Younghusband – and yet he is an Indian writer, writing about the ecology of his own country. As much as his book is about snow leopards, it also asks us to consider their biographers: who is it who gets to tell the story of the nonhuman lives around us?

Despite its name, the snow leopard has little in common with the leopard (its closest living relative is the tiger). And, unlike the leopard, it is adapted to the harsh and rugged terrain of the highest ranges. It has an absurdly bushy tail, used both as extra limb and voluminous shawl, and large paws which act like snow shoes. What it lacks in power, it makes up for in agility and guile (snow leopards can chase their prey down steep cliff faces, and have been known to drive horses into deep snow where they can be picked off). They are extremely difficult to spot; Suryawanshi observes that their "ochre-and-dust-colour coat with its irregular rosettes looks exactly like a rock covered with lichens".

I have read much about the snow leopard, or rather books by writers searching for some ideal version of them. Suryawanshi's book is very different, and can almost be read in opposition to the quest narratives of, say, Peter Matthiessen or Sylvain Tesson. Much like a conservationist's diary, his book is shorn of romance, and recounts the grind of observing snow leopards in remote parts of the world, far away from his wife and young daughter. He wades through snow, sets up camera traps, and tries to defuse tensions with local herders. His snow leopards are part of an ecosystem, just like any other animal; they are hated and loved, as well as being objects of indifference.

Much of Suryawanshi's work is dedicated to mediating conflict between the cats and locals. He assists in the design of a livestock enclosure that can deter the claws and ingenuity of a hungry snow leopard, and makes recommendations on schemes to compensate herders whose animals have been killed. Interestingly, he notes that women are the most hostile to snow leopards as they are the ones who look after livestock (and do not necessarily benefit from compensation schemes). One local woman asks him: "why don't you marry one of your snow leopards?"

There is a critique here of the stories that we have told ourselves about the snow leopard, an attempt to wrest it back from literary and metropolitan writers. In one section, Suryawanshi retraces Matthiessen's steps in Nepal, but it seems as though his heart isn't really in it. Along the way, he notices the effects of mass tourism, and learns that Nepal's richest man, who owns an instant noodle company, had sought to build a resort in a remote village for tourists hoping to spot snow leopards. He takes a gentle swipe at Matthiessen: did the American writer ever stop to think about the consequences of mythologising the creature?

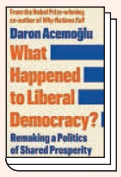
I think it's a push to blame Matthiessen for the plight of the snow leopard, in the same way that Melville shouldn't be held accountable for the decline in sperm whales. But Suryawanshi's point is that stories matter: the snow leopard has become a commodity in the way that Everest has, a mountain to be summited. The effect of this book is a gradual stripping away of mystification, revealing the snow leopard to be fragile and beautiful just like any other inhabitant of high mountain ranges – the pika, the wild yak, the Pallas's cat – but no less wondrous for it, and no less deserving of our attention and respect.

To buy a copy for £17 go to guardianbookshop.com

How to fix democracy

An economist argues for liberal principles

Steven Poole



POLITICS

What Happened to Liberal Democracy?
Remaking a Politics of Shared Prosperity
Daron Acemoğlu
PROFILE, £25

In 2009, the tech billionaire Peter Thiel published an essay with the portentous title The Education of a Libertarian, in which he announced: "I no longer believe that freedom and democracy are compatible." Since the 1920s, he wrote, "the vast increase in welfare beneficiaries and the extension of the franchise to women" had rendered the notion of "capitalist democracy" an oxymoron. Thiel still seems happy to exercise his freedom to extract money from democracies, via his co-founding of Palantir, which was lately given lots of money by the NHS.

Thiel calls himself, as many such do, a "classical liberal", but Daron Acemoğlu argues that his ilk still has much in common with left-liberals. All of them, he writes, agree on "the desirability of basic individual rights and freedoms (including the right not to be coerced and the freedoms of expression, religion, association, and choice); constraints on power, especially political power; and broad protections for equality before the law". On his telling, by the mid-20th century democracy with liberal characteristics had amply proved its worth: blue-collar labour was rewarded, and there was a sense of "shared prosperity".

But now, he argues, liberal democracy is in a crisis, largely owing to the abandonment of the working class by liberalism's "progressive" wing. In post-industrial Europe and the US, the left ceased to speak of economic class and spoke instead of identity. It is a similar diagnosis to that offered by the French sociologist Didier Eribon in his Retour à Reims, and indeed by Bernie Sanders, who has spoken of "a Democratic party which has abandoned working-class people", but Acemoğlu is happier to wield culture-war rhetoric even as he deplores the culture wars. He accuses the left, for example, of being obsessed with both "social engineering" (via diversity initiatives) and "thought policing", which is impossible (he means speech policing).

His solution is a new contract of "working-class liberal democracy", which concentrates on improving the standard of living of the least educated or skilled. This is to be done by focusing on economic growth (reducing, for example, the regulatory hoops one must apparently jump through to become a hairdresser or a masseur), encouraging more community decision-making (possibly imitating the citizens' assemblies used in the Republic of Ireland), and making social media companies responsible, as publishers, for the messages they promote to users (good luck!). He suggests legislating in favour of "worker AI", by which employees could use expert systems based on machine-learning to help them be more productive, so that nurses, for instance, could take more medical decisions. (He doesn't report having consulted doctors on this idea.)

Acemoğlu is a smooth and intelligent writer, and there is much in here to fascinate: there is a brilliant explanation of why the American tax code perversely incentivises automation and job destruction, and how the enviable happiness of Norway and Sweden, far from being a result of some innate Nordic wisdom, followed deliberate economic reforms enacted as recently as the 1930s.

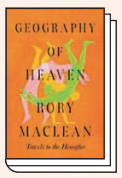
But his expansive rhetoric does lead to some internal inconsistencies. Acemoğlu denounces the progressive-liberal elites in exactly the same way as modern populists do. Yet, having eased the reader through a potted history of the ideas of Rousseau, Hobbes, Locke, Mill, Kant, Voltaire et al, he concedes that liberalism itself was the invention of a small bunch of clever people: "an ideology created by a highly learned group of philosophers". So maybe elites are good, sometimes? And Acemoğlu can hardly escape the charge that his own book – one written by a Nobel-winning economist, no less – is itself an example of the kind of top-down "elite debates" he claims to think are sterile. Nor should he try to, because the charge would be stupid; indeed, the kind of thing that an elite billionaire like Peter Thiel would say.

To buy a copy for £21.25 go to guardianbookshop.com

Soul searching

A travel writer's odyssey after the death of his wife

Kathryn Bromwich



MEMOIR

Geography of Heaven
Travels to the Hereafter
Rory MacLean
ABACUS, £22

In this moving, sometimes grandiloquent grief-memoir-cum-travelogue, Rory MacLean pairs an affinity for new-age thinking with a habit of loftily holding forth ("none of us are created for naught", "love can but lead to truth") and a proclivity for arresting one-liners ("I watched gods walk on fire"). In his search for meaning in the five years after his wife's untimely death from cancer, he shows himself to be both refreshingly broad-minded and unnecessarily crotchety, like a more cantankerous Michael Palin.

MacLean's work as a travel writer has taken him across the world, whether flying a handbuilt plane over Crete or riding shotgun with a drug warlord in Burma. This is his first book since losing Katrin, for 32 years the "fixed point" in his life, whose final weeks and moments he describes tenderly. Unable to process her death, he turns to travel to seek out "thin places": *áiteanna tanaí* in Celtic mythology, where the veil between worlds is porous. Starting in Jerusalem, his quest takes him to more than a dozen sacred locations, including an ashram in India, a Native American community in South Dakota, an "excruciating" Vipassanā retreat in Suffolk and, inevitably, an ayahuasca ceremony in Peru.

You can't fault his commitment. He takes the alarming decision – mere weeks before the 7 October attacks – to infiltrate an Israeli settlement in the West Bank, hiding in the shadows from IDF patrols, in an attempt to recreate the circumstances under which Jacob ("a traveller like me") dreamed of a ladder to heaven. In the US, he faces an oncoming tornado, "too transfixed by the unfolding storm" to seek shelter; in Bhutan, he spends two days travelling to a Buddhist festival along a road that is "little more than a narrow ledge hacked into the rock face".

MacLean's skills as a travel writer are evident. He brings to life a Herzogian boat journey down a river into the Amazon, "twisting like a serpent towards another world". He describes a cremation ground in Bhutan in rich, resonant detail, from the "barley burned in a metal basin, its smell said to keep hungry ghosts at bay", to the throaty chanting of the monks. In South Africa, he consults a sangoma or diviner; to this day, the country has four times more traditional diviners and herbalists than medical doctors. At the Rosebud Sioux Reservation, he witnesses a remarkable ritual involving trance-like dancing and offerings of flesh. The discussions of Victorian spiritualism and the use of AI to bypass grief are thoughtful and well judged.

But there are jarring tonal shifts, from the pompous ("Does sanctity fall from above or is it conditional on social convention, I wondered?") to the colloquial ("kick the bucket", "bunkum"). And more than once, the book is let down by outdated language about minority groups (described as "crippled" and "swarthy-skinned"). Do we really need to know whether every woman he encounters is "slender" or "chubby"?

Throughout, MacLean treads the line between credulous and open-minded. Science is invoked occasionally, only to be dismissed as "reductionist" and "pathetic". Instead, he becomes fixated on numerology, calculating "the maths" of when Katrin will be reincarnated (according to different people he consults, 49 days after her death, or years later, potentially as a dog). He compiles a dossier of evidence that, in his mind, proves "without doubt" that Katrin's soul lives on: a dream, a sunbeam, a blue ribbon, a friend's furniture in Mexico being inexplicably rearranged.

In each new location, his soul-searching follows a pattern: initial disappointment, followed by a last-minute breakthrough. Much of the book hinges on him feeling a vague, indefinable presence – a tingling, a shift in the air – undoubtedly profound to him but almost impossible to put into words ("something infinitely subtle … it was there, and more than nothing"), which can be frustrating for the reader. A somewhat belaboured flight metaphor eventually leads him, many figurative and literal air miles later, to the realisation that what matters is the journey, not the destination.

To buy a copy for £19.80 go to guardianbookshop.com

MacLean at a Buddhist festival in Bhutan

A remote valley in Virginia, where Children of the Wild is set

Brothers in arms

Violence drives this gripping tale of a friendship forged in war

Marcel Theroux

Children of the Wild
Kevin Powers
ATLANTIC, £14.99

TERRY KELLY/GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

KEVIN POWERS'S FOURTH NOVEL marks a return to the themes and subject matter of his acclaimed debut The Yellow Birds, winner of the 2012 Guardian first book award. Through the lives of its central characters, it explores the courage, folly, cruelty and absurdity involved in war, and the challenges of adjusting to civilian life afterwards. But while The Yellow Birds focused on the experience of US soldiers fighting in Iraq, where Powers himself served between 2003 and 2004, Children of the Wild is set amid the carnage of the first world war.

It follows the fortunes of two young men from a remote valley in Virginia. Roy is the arrogant young heir to a wealthy local landowner; Ennis is an orphan of unknown origin who has been living, like a character in a fairytale, in a shack on the top of a mountain. Ennis and Roy are first linked in a love triangle when Ennis is lured off his mountain top by his desire for Samantha, the daughter of the local minister, whose eyes have the "lustre of smoky quartz". Roy has expected to marry Samantha, but she chooses feral Ennis. Roy and Ennis settle their differences with a mighty punch-up that cements an unlikely friendship between them.

When Roy joins the army to fight in France as an officer, he persuades Ennis to come with him as a private. This becomes a source of guilt to Roy as the novel unfolds. Unequal in terms of class and status, Roy and Ennis are also asymmetrically talented at killing. Roy, though nominally the leader, is haunted by terrifying dreams and finds the responsibility of his role overwhelming. Ennis turns out to have an Achilles-like genius for warfare.

Born out of a brawl, the relationship between Roy and Ennis turns out to be by far the strongest attachment in the novel. It's reinforced by subsequent acts of violence that include killings on and off the battlefield. Roy is both in awe of Ennis and fearful of him. Indifferent to praise or glory, Ennis is "at home in a dark corner of his soul that Roy didn't even want to acknowledge existed in his own".

Powers is a tremendously gifted writer. He has an amazing knack for storytelling that seems to unfold visually and conveys landscapes, gestures and complex military engagements with great flair. His economical prose makes brisk work of a gripping tale that includes violent set pieces on the battlefields of France, war crimes, a pandemic, a quest through the mountains of Ohio, murders, a flashback to the bloodshed at Little Big Horn, and a powerful ending that reminds you, once more, of the heartbreak war brings in its wake.

Powers writes about violence and its impact on both perpetrators and victims in a way that feels unsettlingly authoritative. When Ennis commandeers a German machine gun, you sense that the scene is informed by more than academic research: Powers was himself a machine-gunner in the Iraq war. Various characters, including a civil war veteran, punctuate self-aggrandising Roy's delusions about warfare and loss with memorably gritty wisdom. "Every single person on this earth has a hole inside them where someone they loved used to be," one person tells him. "You sit there thinking that hole inside of you is special."

Buried in the pages of the book is a telling allusion that hints at Powers's ambition for it. On two occasions, in the context of terrible acts of violence – a scalping and a lynching – different characters utter these words to Roy: "Come and see." Both times, Roy draws our attention to the phrase by repeating it: "'Come and see'? It was familiar, but Roy couldn't place it."

Powers wants the reader to notice the words and supply the missing context: "Come and see" is the dark invitation that John the Revelator receives in the final book of the Bible to witness the apocalypse. It's also the title of a Soviet film directed by Elem Klimov that has a strong claim to be the most harrowing war movie ever made. Very much like Klimov's film, Powers mixes incredible visual intensity with the mythic and surreal in order to illuminate the apocalyptic extremes of human behaviour.

Yet his desire to make the story resonate at an epic level also makes parts of the novel melodramatic and implausible. Ennis's journey down the mountain and his progression from feral cow-wrangler to cold-eyed killer never feels fully persuasive and is punctuated by moments of improbability. This isn't limited to Ennis: characters have a habit of doing things that are dramatically striking, but psychologically far-fetched. And then there's Fintan Thoreau, Roy's ghastly future brother-in-law, whose villainy motivates an important section of the plot but feels cartoonish.

There's also something uncomfortable about the book's representation of violence. Officially, violence is repellent, but it's pretty cool too, especially when our heroes are cutting a swathe through German soldiers, who are depicted with a one-sidedness that reminded me of the jingoistic Warlord comics that were a guilty pleasure of my childhood.

Though I enjoyed the book a great deal and admired Powers's bravura, economical prose, I ended up comparing it to other books about the same conflict. The first world war has many chronicles: All Quiet on the Western Front, Good-Bye to All That, Birdsong, Pat Barker's Regeneration trilogy. The best of these manage to depict the awfulness of warfare with both more banality and more humour. I recently reread Frederick Manning's 1929 novel The Middle Parts of Fortune alongside Alice Winn's 2023 debut In Memoriam. I found their foul-mouthed soldiers and doomed public schoolboys more lastingly real than the avatars of Children of the Wild, with their murky backstories and portentous dream lives.

To buy a copy for £13.49 go to guardianbookshop.com

Pictures of the past

An elegaic love letter to the YBA era

Keiran Goddard

Exhibition
Alex Hyde
GRANTA, £14.99

For all the wrong reasons, Damien Hirst's Shark (The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living) has a claim to being the most prescient British artwork of the last half-century: a grim parable of neoliberalism. In 1991, it was still possible to mistake the predatory violence of that system for a kind of animal vitality. But today, open-mouthed, dead-eyed and decayed, it speaks only of a regime preserved far beyond its natural lifespan, lauded exclusively by institutions that can profit from its ugliness.

Alex Hyde's second novel, an elegant *Künstlerroman* which plays out during a lightly fictionalised version of the YBA explosion, explores the resonance of that particular cultural inflection point: a moment when the collapse of the postwar cultural settlement, municipal culture and public institutions was transfigured decisively and ubiquitously into individualised, confessional artistic capital.

It tells the story of Rabble Stone, a working-class photography student who moves to London and falls into the orbit of a moneyed, cosmopolitan artistic set. Among them is the unnamed artist, now deceased, to whom the novel is primarily addressed through a series of elegiac reminiscences, unpicking their entanglement as friends, muses and occasional antagonists.

Central to this relationship are the ways in which their respective selfhoods become intertwined and distorted via their ongoing artistic collaboration. Rabble begins to photograph the artist, a series of intimate, confrontational portraits that are eventually physically incorporated into the artist's figurative drawings and paintings. Hyde's descriptions of the work strongly evoke Tracey Emin, as does its subsequent journey from localised art-world curio to highly valuable, globally exhibited market commodity.

Thematically, there is an air of predictability in how this all plays out. Questions of self-authorship, doubling, co-option, plagiarism and the quasi-erotics of display and representation are handled well enough, but will feel overfamiliar to many readers. There are also occasions where the language is imprecise and hesitant in ways that appear to be stylistic lapses rather than stylistic choices. Hyde leans heavily on superposition; needs are "base and noble at the same time", faces are "ugly and beautiful at the same time", characters feel "something and nothing at the same time".

The novel also contains passages of precise and inventive writing. She writes particularly well and tenderly about bodily exhaustion, both among the working-class communities of Rabble's youth, and the struggling artists she later encounters in New York. Similarly, the character of Duncan, an effervescent aesthete who succumbs to the ravages of addiction, is handled with delicacy, a lightness of touch that captures the horror of chasing ghosts until you finally become one.

To write about images is to render things that are fundamentally spatial, relational and simultaneous into sentences that are necessarily sequential, disaggregated and hierarchical. The standard way out of this dilemma for a novelist is to focus the description such that it tells us less about the artwork than about the sensibilities and feelings of the character viewing it. In Exhibition, however, Hyde repeatedly goes a step further and engages directly with the theoretical challenge at hand, allowing Rabble to talk at length about composition, the role of the lens, the function of framing; how photographs "are not taken … they are made".

And that Rabble is a photographer, rather than, say, a sculptor or a painter, hints at what appears to me to be the novel's central philosophical concern; namely remembrance, nostalgia and preservation. It is photographs we turn to, after all, to re-narrativise our lives, to reflect on distances travelled and the alternate turns we might have taken along the way. That feeling of melancholic reflection suffuses Exhibition and is its primary achievement. For just as Rabble is left mourning lost friends and collaborators, we as readers are left mourning the loss of something larger and more significant, an entire structure of possibility. Exhibition is a eulogy for a world of livable rents, radical art schools, free higher education and opportunities for working-class artists, for a society in which a life like Rabble's, spent making beautiful things out of the people and places she loved, was not seen as a risible pipe dream or as the gate-kept preserve of the select few.
To buy a copy for £12.74 go to guardianbookshop.com

Enemies reunited

Familial dysfunction in a darkly funny debut

Ella Fox-Martens

A Sense of Occasion
Brodie Crellin
JONATHAN CAPE, £16.99

Most of us come upon our family's dysfunctions gradually, like a door that opens a little wider each year. This uncle, you find out, has had an affair; grandma has a hoarding problem. The cremation of the nuclear family illusion is a cornerstone of literature, especially when it's hastened by one of those unavoidable core gatherings: weddings, births, funerals. But what happens when there was never any illusion to start with; when the story begins in the ashes?

The delight of Brodie Crellin's accomplished, surprising debut lies in the way it wrestles with this question, and in its depiction of a family that fails to meet any conventional definition of the word. With a cutting eye and wry humour, Crellin finds fantastic power in the story of three maladjusted people reeling in the face of death, whose relationships to one another are endlessly confronting and complex.

There is friendless Patch, riddled with anxiety, who bursts into tears at the memory of the postman's suicide and falls victim to a terrible haircut. There is Patch's father, Robin, who is "gay, yes, mostly, but mutable". And there is Jude, her domineering, malevolently competent cousin, a playwright who "loves to make an entrance". They're bound by the newly deceased Mary: Robin's ex, Patch's mother, and Jude's aunt – a woman who "[didn't] have a problem with gay men" but was lukewarm on lesbians. Orbiting this "isosceles", as Jude calls it, is Juliette, Jude's gleefully moneyed mother, and Mel, Mary's neighbour. Various other characters swing in and out, all fully realised no matter how brief their appearances, my favourite of which was Mary's poor, forgotten "empath" labrador, Leonard.

The stage is set, as Jude cruises in from Naples, for a fraught collision of past and present. As the funeral draws closer and tensions simmer, Crellin juggles the minutiae of death – chopping vegetables, arranging memorial photos – with fragmented recollections of messy family history. It's rare to read a novel that can skip in and out of so many points of view and keep the different styles of narration intact. Yet even with regular flashbacks, A Sense of Occasion feels natural thanks to Crellin's light touch, especially in the arch, zippy dialogue. There are shades of classic mid-century stories, particularly Dorothy Baker's Cassandra at the Wedding, and of the caustic social wit of Edward St Aubyn's Melrose chronicles, but the boldness feels entirely modern.

It's a joy, too, to read fiction that understands sex so well, and is neither sentimental nor sleazy. Crellin conveys the importance of sex as a vehicle for each character's foibles and desires; as a shadowy place where so much can be manipulated and communicated. The book summons up a kaleidoscope of erotic experience across the spectrum, sometimes hot and sometimes ridiculous, including a quasi-incestuous relationship rendered with nuance and consideration.

If the novel leans a little hard on Jude and her mother, Juliette, for its class critiques, it's easily forgiven on account of just how much fun it is to watch these characters crash into each other, and for the deftly nasty one-liners that they toss out. "Patch lacked the confidence conferred by a private education," Jude thinks smugly. "But she could also say

Brodie Crellin

that Patch was simply less intelligent." And yet the story never veers into mean-spirited satire, largely thanks to Patch herself, the grief-stricken daughter, who is the heartbeat of the novel. Perennially misunderstood and underestimated – including by her own mother, when she was alive – Patch is awkward but raw, a keen observer of herself and others.

There is immense pleasure and vitality – and ultimately a great deal of tenderness – in A Sense of Occasion's depiction of flawed, strange people who love badly, and can't help but get in the way of themselves over and over again. After all, as George Bernard Shaw wrote, "If you cannot get rid of the family skeleton, you may as well make it dance."

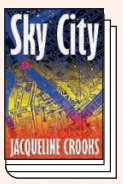
To buy a copy for £15.29 go to guardianbookshop.com

Life in pieces

An ambitious portrait of trauma and belonging

Emma Loffhagen

Sky City
Jacqueline Crooks
JONATHAN CAPE, £18.99



The world of Sky City never quite settles beneath your feet. The action of Jacqueline Crooks's second novel unfolds in a recognisable 1990s London, yet everything seems subtly untethered from reality: a council estate suspended above the city, voices drifting in and out through pirate radio, ghosts walking beside the living. The narrative floats just above the surface of the everyday, a world where trauma transforms the mundane into something uncanny.

We first meet protagonist Jaycee as a child, trapped in a west London housing estate she calls the Cyborg House. Her stepfather subjects her to horrific sexual abuse while her mother turns a blind eye, exercising her own brand of cruelty. Families, Jaycee comes to believe, are dangerous places, "like nests of poisonous spiders". Eventually taken into care, she finds an unlikely lifeline in Ella-G, another damaged girl whose exuberance masks wounds as profound as Jaycee's own. The care home turns out to be similarly brutal, and the pair survive together, forging a friendship that becomes the novel's emotional anchor.

As adults, Jaycee and Ella-G could hardly seem more different. Jaycee retreats into solitude in her high-rise council flat in Sky City, an estate perched above a shopping centre in north London where Crooks herself once lived. In a near-perennial state of dissociation, she imagines herself transformed by trauma into something less than fully human. Ella-G, meanwhile, propelled by her restless charisma, heads to the bright lights of New York's music scene.

Through a conversation between past and present, Jaycee's childhood seeps into the contemporary narrative in shards of memory and recurring visions, her adult life continually interrupted by the child she once was. Crooks sketches this psychic dislocation with extraordinary imaginative force. The abuse reverberates through Jaycee's consciousness in fragments. She is haunted by Obsidia, a spectral child who comes to represent a version of herself.

The present-day narrative gathers momentum when Jaycee unexpectedly reconnects with Sol, a boy who offered her a rare glimpse of tenderness at secondary school before circumstance tore them apart. Their reunion carries the promise of romance, yet Crooks is after something more subtle than a conventional love story. Sol becomes another lost soul searching for belonging, his own fractured identity mirroring Jaycee's.

As in her 2023 Women's prize-shortlisted debut, Fire Rush, music provides the novel's connective tissue and emotional scaffolding. An obscure blues record by a forgotten singer draws Jaycee into a quest that eventually takes her and Ella-G to Atlantic City in the search for a missing father, which becomes inseparable from Jaycee's search for self.

Crooks's prose, too, is deeply musical. Sentences swell and eddy in a dreamlike fashion, looping back on to recurring images before resolving into clarity. It takes a while to acclimatise, and at times the lyricism threatens to overwhelm the narrative.

Sky City is also unapologetically bleak: there is a near constant effluvium of loneliness, hanging over the novel like the weather. Much of the narrative, as Crooks notes in the acknowledgments, is autobiographical. It feels as though she is refusing to soften or redeem her trauma for the reader's comfort. It is a reminder that adversity can be an enduring condition, not a narrative device on the way to catharsis.

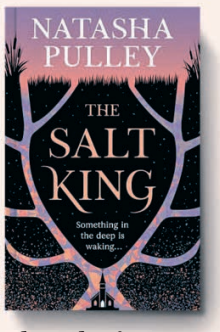
Fire Rush announced a singular literary talent: a novelist capable of fusing the propulsive rhythms of dub music with the spiritual inheritance of African spiritualism, defying conventional realism. Sky City is, in many ways, even more ambitious. It is a haunting, polyphonic meditation on trauma and belonging that hovers between realism and dream, asking how a person might rebuild a self after childhood has shattered it.

To buy a copy for £16.14 go to guardianbookshop.com

BOOKS OF THE MONTH

Science fiction, fantasy and horror

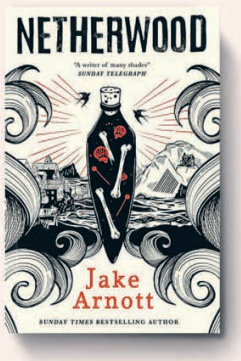
A miracle in the Fens; murder in a mystical empire; dark intrigue in Hastings; and a fawn with a taste for blood. By *Lisa Tuttle*



The Salt King
Natasha Pulley
GOLLANCZ, £22
The latest from the author of The Watchmaker of Filigree Street blends an apocalyptic end-of-the-world tale with folk horror and two slowly developing love stories. Avelyn Brocken is a trainee priest at the Vatican, sent to check out a possible miracle in the Fens of East Anglia. His only qualification for the job is that he was born and raised in Hreodwater, a strange community based around a salt mine with its own language, religion and rituals. But what begins in Hreodwater, involving the mysterious salt light and a sleeping king deep in the mine, threatens civilisations. A rich and gripping tale that's also an interesting exploration of the power of faith.

A Trade of Blood
Robert Jackson Bennett
HODDERSCAPE, £25
A new case for Ana and Din, the crime-solving team introduced in the Hugo and World Fantasy award-winning novel The Tainted Cup, focuses on a murder among the cattle-ranching gentry of the Empire of Khanum. The murderer has been caught red-handed, unable to remember what happened. The victim was his lover, and their families were enemies; he is the last of his line, and fears his family is cursed. The detectives suspect a more material and dangerous adversary behind the scenes, with access to a terrifying weapon. This is the sort of otherworld fantasy that's based on natural laws and science rather than any magical system, and some of the issues it raises are of immediate concern in today's world of shrinking resources. Great world-building and a masterfully conceived mystery make for a compelling cross-genre blend.

Netherwood
Jake Arnott
TITAN, £18.99
London is too expensive, so artist Adam and his partner Justine buy a house in Hastings. They're intrigued by the property's "special feature" – a cave hidden behind a locked door in the back wall. After they move in they discover a Latin phrase carved into the wall, layers of candle wax, a mysterious sealed bottle: evidence of occult rituals? It turns out the previous owner was a devotee of chaos magic, inspired by the notorious Aleister Crowley. Justine fears they could be in danger, sensing the ghostly presence of a frightened girl, but at the same time, their new home is inspiring Adam to create his most powerful paintings. A wonderfully unnerving horror in which Hastings looms large as the most uncanny place in England.



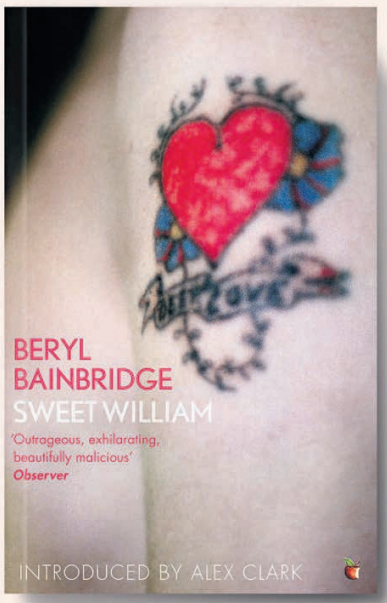
Fawn
CN Vair
3AM, £20
This debut begins with deceptive gentleness, introducing the reader to Tess, a witch in present-day America who sold her soul to the devil in 1935, the price for surviving a murderous attack. She hardly seems to have aged, but is careful to keep the locals from noticing, using spells to turn unwanted attention away and keep herself and her animal sanctuary safe. Things start to go wrong when she rescues a fawn, born at the wrong time of year with teeth and a thirst for blood. She ignores advice to put it down, but when the local cop insists it must be destroyed, and a new preacher arrives in town, seeming to turn her friends against her, she struggles to maintain control. Like a newborn fawn, she's doomed to be seen as prey. Tess refuses to accept defeat; she will do whatever it takes to survive in this disturbing, seductively written fiction about power and female rage.

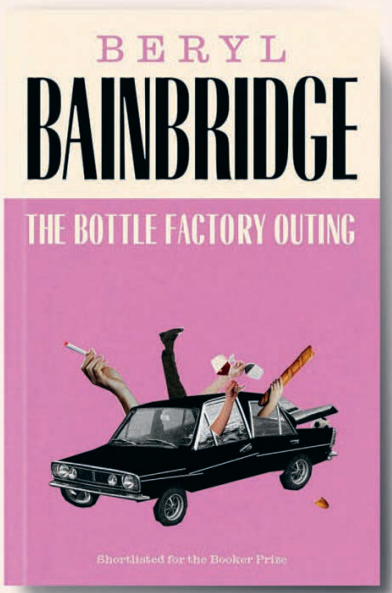
Ranked! Beryl Bainbridge

From the last days of the Titanic to desperate romantics ... *John Self* rates the work of a British master of black comedy

10 Every Man for Himself (1996)
Bainbridge's novel of the last days on RMS Titanic was acclaimed and popular ("They probably thought it was the book of the film," she said), and the scenes of the sinking are brilliantly delivered. "There is about me an element of showmanship," says one character. But Bainbridge's own showmanship is muffled here by her need to stick with facts, meaning the novel lacks the humour, fluidity and eccentricity of her others. And unlike her earlier books, the final tragedy never feels personal to the characters.
Sample line: "He did have layers, but like an onion they were all the same."

9 Harriet Said (1972)
Bainbridge's darkest novel is about the teenage narrator and her older, cooler friend Harriet. "I've always run wild," our girl says: a common trait in Bainbridge novels. (She herself was "expelled from school at the age of nine because of some dirty rhyme".) When the narrator and Harriet get involved with a married man, there's a lot of "adolescent trembling, swirls of nerves gone gold" – and mortal danger. It's a story of power and corrupted innocence: but who's corrupting whom?
Sample line: "I often called on God when I was at school or away from Harriet. I just wanted something to happen."





8 Master Georgie (1998)
The fifth of Bainbridge's novels to be shortlisted for the Booker prize – "our table was always the most cheerful, because we didn't expect to win" – was another based on historical events. She turned to these after she had "used up" her life in her earlier autobiographical novels. A subtle book that rewards rereading, it's set around the Crimean war, narrated in turn by the hangers-on of medic George Hardy. The story comes as a series of snapshot moments, as the characters hurtle toward disaster. "One should never underestimate the disruptive force of haphazard actions," says one, and Bainbridge's characters know all about those.
Sample line: "Some people only weep inside, which I think wasteful."

7 A Quiet Life (1976)
Of all Bainbridge's novels, this offers the most direct account of her "terrifying" childhood in Liverpool when, as she later recalled, her mother and father fought so much "my brother and I would never be out of the house at the same time [so as] to stop them killing each other". Through siblings Alan and Madge, we see their mother's restless domestic rearrangements ("Everything in its place, though never for long") and a bad-tempered father, but also the demons that drove him there. Little wonder that "Madge threw herself about in a transport of unexplained grief". But it's also a charming, funny, bittersweet portrait of a vanished world of meat pies, fruit drops and poultices on boils.
Sample line: "Though the war was over, Father was still caught in a cross-fire, harassed by battles, by phantom cities tumbling about his ears."

6 Sweet William (1975)
Many of Bainbridge's characters long for the transformative effects of love, are so hungry for change that they grab on to it, even if it's not the right change. Playwright and lothario William provides it for as many women as will have him. ("What did you think when I first met you?" "I thought I had flu.") Even as his deceits are uncovered, he gets away with it. "You don't want to expect normality from him," one of his lovers says to another. "He's an artist after all." The novel has the delicious shiver provided by a really good bad guy.
Sample line: "Her doctor said she was a healthy young woman – all normal. Not my heart, she thought. Surely my heart's not normal."

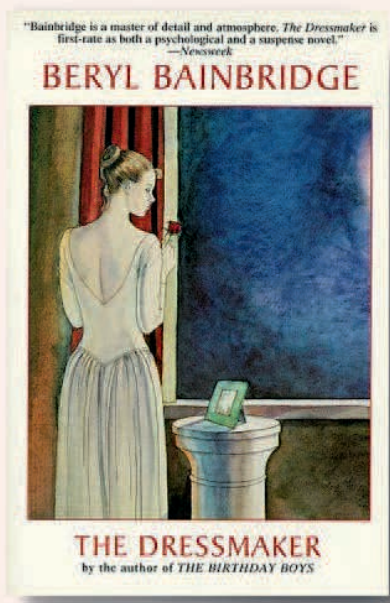
5 An Awfully Big Adventure (1989)
Set, like many of Bainbridge's novels, in postwar Liverpool, this book brings us an ungovernable girl, Stella, and her efforts to become an actor. (Bainbridge acted before she wrote, and appeared in the eighth episode of Coronation Street in 1961.) She falls for the director, Meredith Potter, with his "Gestapo monocle", as he prepares a production of Peter Pan. This is Bainbridge at her most demanding – "I don't like to be obvious or spell things out" – and the reader must stay alert, but the rewards are rich.
Sample line: "[Meredith] had never known a father, being the issue of a man who smoked cigars and a girl plucked from the typing pool of the Cunard buildings in 1913."

4 Injury Time (1977)
Bainbridge's best books are both funny and sad: when, early on, her publisher suggested she write a black comedy, "it was like taking a cork out of a bottle". This is an extreme example of the form: a farce, where everyone seems to be having an affair with everyone else, turns into a hostage drama as a dinner party is invaded by criminals. The darkest moments are rough even by Bainbridge's standards, but the overall tone is exuberant, even antic.
Sample line: "Why couldn't he pretend that he longed to leave his wife, so that she in return could pretend she wished he would?"

3 The Birthday Boys (1991)
Easily the best of Bainbridge's novels based on historical events, this takes us into the minds of Robert Scott ("I'm simply no good when I'm not doing something") and the four men who went with him to the South Pole – and part of the way back. "We did our business in our britches and shook the turds out when they froze." Each voice is a brilliant act of ventriloquism from Bainbridge, but what underlies the men's relationships as they crawl toward disaster is the great immovable glacier of the English class system.
Sample line: "How curious it is that passion has so little to do with feeling cheerful."

2 The Bottle Factory Outing (1974)
Most of Bainbridge's novels end in death: this one opens that way too. Mismatched friends Freda (who "longed to be flung into the midst of chaos") and Brenda (who wears a coat in bed) both work at a bottling factory, where they navigate desires for and attention from their Italian colleagues. A works day out leads to chaos with horses, a broken toilet, a barrel of brandy, and more death. Here, slapstick and tragedy don't alternate, but happen at the same time, as Bainbridge once more makes us laugh at things we shouldn't be laughing at.
Sample line: "She supposed it was the fumes from the wine that kept them all in a constant state of lust."

1 The Dressmaker (1973)
Desperate romantics are Bainbridge's speciality. Sensible Nellie ("Never sit down on someone else's lav and never eat a shop-bought meat pie") isn't one, but her sister Marge ("the big blaze that died down through lack of fuel") is. So is the niece that lives with them, Rita, who falls in love with an American GI. This is Bainbridge at her best: shocking, sinister, and perfectly expressing her characters' internal turmoil, which by some process of alchemy results in the blackest of comedy.
Sample line: "She wished she was Bette Davis, Joan Crawford, languidly sitting in a long dress, calling them darling, loving and loyal always – but cool like a snake, telling them to go before they told her."



‘Grief was my brand’

Writing a memoir helped *Freya Bromley* to come to terms with her brother’s death, but its success left her feeling guilty and overwhelmed. Had she commodified her family tragedy?

When my memoir about my life after my brother’s death was published, I was very fortunate that people connected with it. It’s not easy to feel good fortune from the worst thing that’s ever happened to you. But I suppose I felt pleased when the experience that had once made me so lonely suddenly became a point of connection.

I had not always been an open book. I was 22 when my brother died from a rare bone cancer. The people around me didn’t know what to say about this awful thing, so they pretended it hadn’t happened and I pretended, too. For a few years I was a ghost in my own life. Nothing felt real. I got very good at imitating normality, imagining I was in a video game called Office.

There were other simulations such as Dating and Fun Friend Hangout where it was game over when I brought up death. A numbness settled in. Grief, and the subsequent silence around it, had obliterated my sense of who I was. My reality had been shattered, and I was unsure how I fitted within the life I once had. I found that, at this time of my life, even to be looked in the eyes was incredibly uncomfortable. The thought of someone seeing my pain was excruciating. Or perhaps it was the fear of them not searching for it at all.

Maybe these years of feeling so unseen made me want to share myself with people through writing. My 2024 book The Tidal Year follows the year I swam in every tidal pool in Britain with a friend. I like to say it’s a memoir about swimming that isn’t really about swimming at all. It’s about loss, and how to find joy in your life as a young person after a tragedy. Readers knew my most intimate moments, and many shared their own. Late at night, I’d receive messages on Instagram with confessions of people’s PTSD. Sometimes people emailed me shocking, explicit details of a death close to them. I was moved that something I’d written had prompted them to contact me. Writing had transformed my life, and I believed that whether it was a book, email or a DM there was power in acknowledging your pain through words.

At first, I felt an enormous pressure to reply with something articulate and wise. This was hardest in person. If someone started crying at the signing table, as they often did, there was an awkward distance between us. Should I stand up to hug them? What could I say to make it better? I learned that it wasn’t at all about what I replied. It was about listening. Most people, when they lose someone, don’t get to say the name of their loved one any more. The best thing I could say is: who’s the person you’re missing? What were they like?

Having these conversations has been a real privilege. And I must admit I became rather addicted to them. I pitched myself for events, volunteered with bereavement charities, used all my holiday to travel the country visiting bookshops. However, the best thing about the book was also the worst: I’d alchemised my grief into something powerful, positive, productive and I soon became consumed by guilt that I’d commodified our family tragedy. Looking back, I think I felt that if the book did well enough, if it helped enough people, then perhaps I could be redeemed from writing it at all.

At events, I opened up my grief like a suitcase and waited for people to unpack all their sadness into it, then I took it home again. On the train, I’d wonder where to put all the stories people had handed me. A brother collapses on a rugby pitch. A mother drowns in the sea. A sister is murdered by her husband … I was thinking about death all the time. I often worried whether I looked sad enough, and if people felt I was heartless or fake if I didn’t. Sometimes at readings, people asked me why I wasn’t crying. In publicity meetings for my book, I’d been asked to come up with social media ideas. Are there any significant anniversaries you could post on, they asked. I didn’t want to turn any more sad moments into content, but maybe that’s what I’d signed up for. I suppose I made my brand grief, and I’ve often wondered what happens to the soul of a person with a brand like that.

‘I opened up my grief like a suitcase and waited for people to unpack all their sadness into it, then I took it home’

I recently saw the writer and climate justice organiser Mikaela Loach post about being hospitalised for a long-term undiagnosed illness. She said that during a recent meeting with Meta they showed a selection of her posts and revealed that when she cried, they performed best, so maybe she should create more like that. The next day I was served an advert by Instagram aimed at “Creators” that suggested a new Reel template going from “Sad Girl Winter” to “Hot Girl Summer” with space for selfies of crying to camera.

Before we experience great tragedies, I think we all have this idea that death is something that brings families together. That we will hold each other and cry and bond. In some ways this is true. I have never been hugged tighter than when I saw my big brother, Lawrence, after we got the news that today would be the day.

But what follows can be so devastating. You’re all trying not to knock the bruise. You’re all trying to get by, as best you can. There’s a lot of silence. There’s a lot of crying alone. There are a lot of misunderstandings because you’re all coping in different ways. No one is right, no one is wrong. But sometimes it’s easier to be angry about this, than it is to be angry about the person who’s been taken from you, because at least in one of those situations you have some semblance of control.

Although I’d spent two years touring the country talking about grief, I still couldn’t talk about it with those closest to me. Why is it so difficult to be unhappy around the people you’ve known the longest? Even today, I don’t know that I can confidently share my feelings with the people I love. I am just too sad. And I love them too much to show them. I don’t want them to worry, after all we’ve been through. I’m sure that they feel the same.

My second book, A Real Piece of Work, is a novel about a family meeting for the fifth anniversary of a death. I wanted this fictional world to be an offering to everyone I’d met – a reckoning with what becomes of a family once the funeral is over. How do our relationships shift when life-changing loss ruptures our existing dynamics? I’m trying to start a family of my own now and I think it’s been important to me to create something real and thorny yet hopeful that captures how most of us are trying our best, even when we misunderstand each other. I do truly believe that.

I don’t believe there is such a thing as moving on. We only ever move through and carry it with us. I carry the weight of a lot of stories now, but somehow it feels all the lighter because of the expansive conversations created between people through books. Fiction has given me new ways to untangle the life-changing force that is grief beyond reflecting only on my own. I’ve just started a new book tour. I still sit at the signing table. And when someone tells me they’re struggling, I ask them about the person they’re missing, so they can say their name again.

A Real Piece of Work is published by Hutchinson Heinemann.

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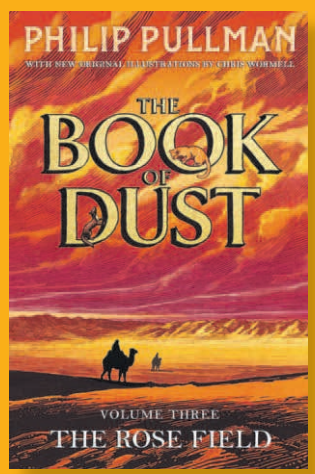

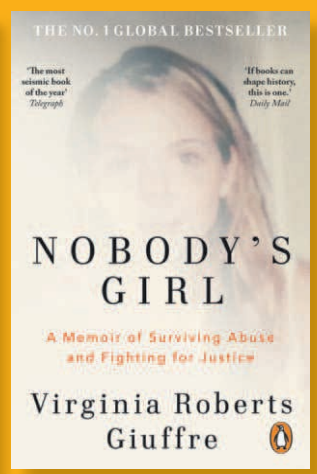

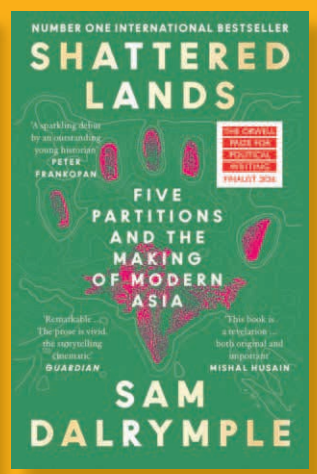

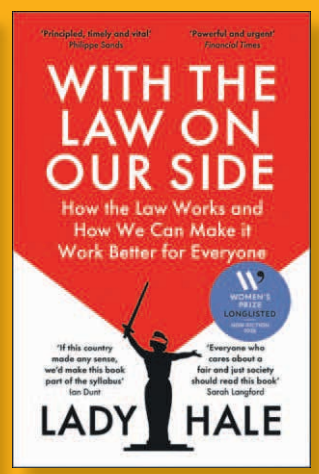

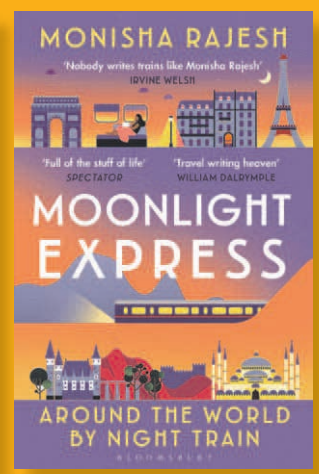

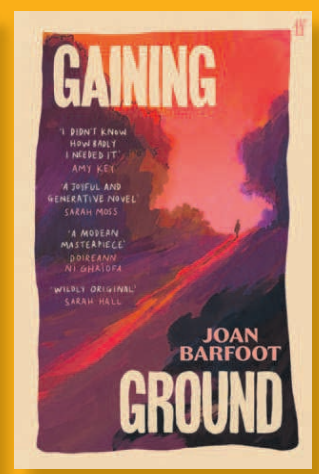

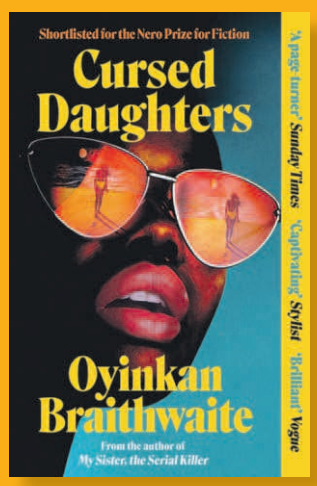

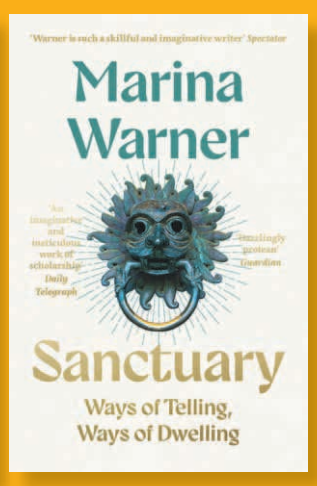

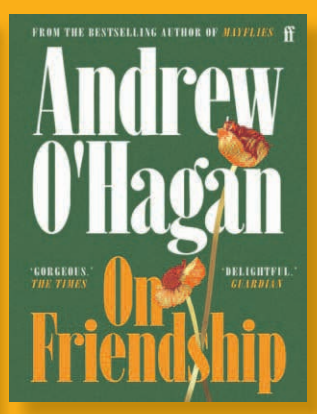

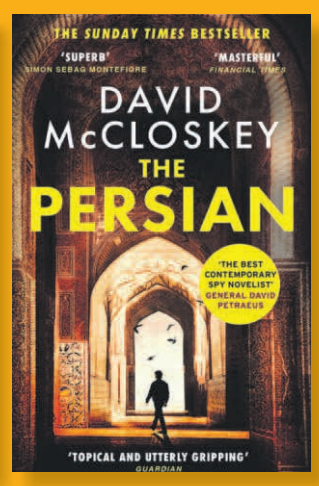

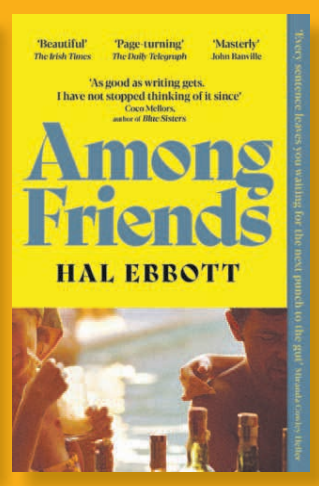

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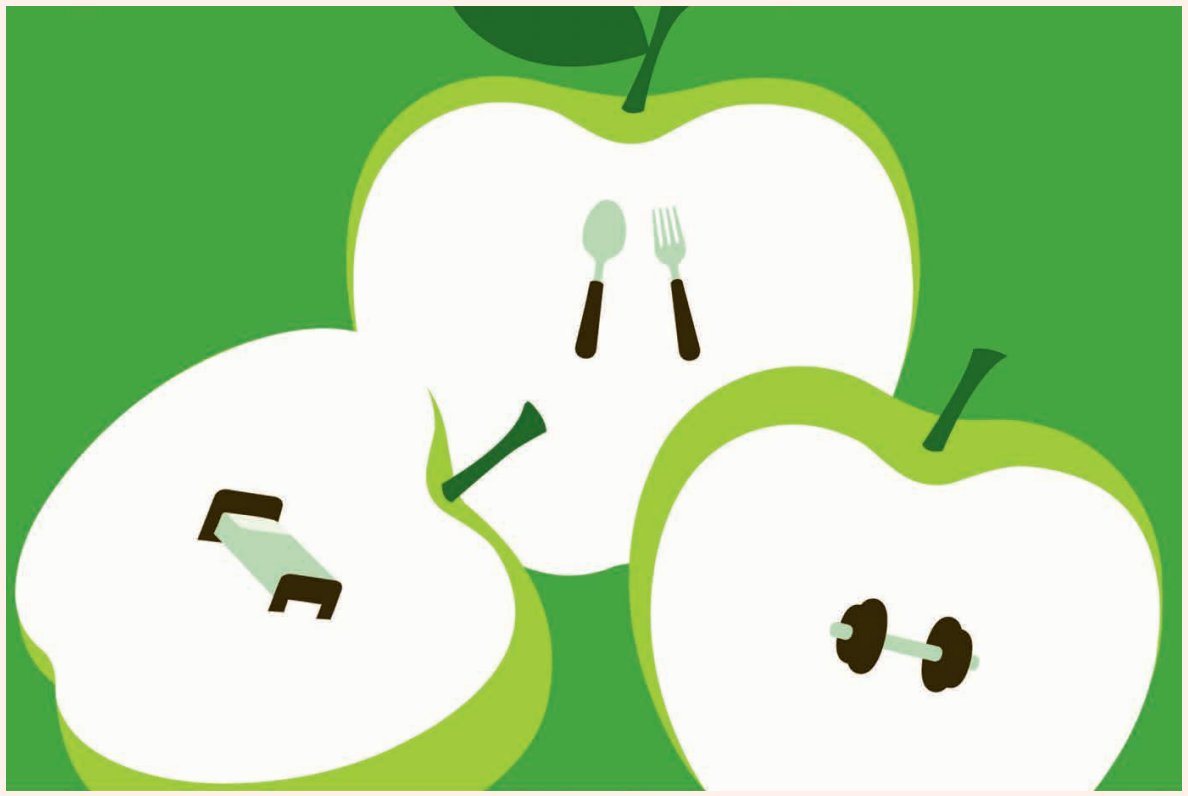


THE BIG IDEA

We know sleep, exercise and diet are vital. But why?

The benefits of all three come down to a crucial piece of cellular kit. By *Hannah Critchlow*

SLEEP. EXERCISE. EAT WELL. It's the oldest recommendation in medicine, repeated so often it's become a cliche. We know the advice, even if we don't always follow it. But have you ever stopped to wonder why these three seemingly different habits have such remarkably similar effects on our brains and bodies?

For generations we've treated them as separate prescriptions – sleep restores us, exercise strengthens us and food fuels us. Yet neuroscience is beginning to suggest something rather more elegant: they're all essentially doing the same job.

What has changed is not the recommendations themselves, but our understanding of the biology beneath them. The more scientists study the brain, the clearer it becomes that cognition is astonishingly energy intensive. Although the brain makes up about 2% of body weight, it uses roughly a fifth of the body's energy at rest. Every memory we retrieve, every decision we make and every creative insight carries a metabolic cost. Thought itself is an energy-hungry act.

That raises an obvious question: where does all that energy come from? The answer lies deep in evolutionary history. More than 2bn years ago, a primitive cell engulfed a bacterium. Instead of being digested, the bacterium remained, forming a long-term partnership with its host.

Over time, this arrangement became one of biology's most important alliances. The bacterium became efficient at capturing the chemical energy stored in food and transforming it into ATP, the molecule that powers almost every biological process. The host offered protection, and together they made complex life possible.

That partnership is still running inside us today. Mitochondria – the descendants of that ancient bacterium – exist in almost every cell in the body. The exception is the mature red blood cell, which removes them to make space for haemoglobin and improve oxygen transport. Even here, biology reveals its logic: everything is shaped by trade-offs in energy efficiency.

For decades, mitochondria were introduced in biology textbooks as the cell's "powerhouses" – important, dependable but rather dull. The stars of the show were undeniably neurons. Today, that picture is changing.

We're discovering that neurons produce thought, ideas and emotions only because mitochondria continuously transform fuel into the energy they need. Intelligence depends not simply on the brain's wiring, but on the uninterrupted flow of energy through that wiring. This is a subtle shift in perspective, but an important one.

Emerging evidence suggests that healthy mitochondrial function helps give rise to intelligence, including driving arithmetic and processing speed, working memory, healthier brain ageing and greater resilience to stress. Mitochondria are no longer viewed as passive batteries but as active participants in the delicate balancing act that allows the brain to adapt, learn and flourish throughout life.

Suddenly, the oldest health advice begins to make much more sense. Exercise doesn't simply boost muscle mass, it bulks up the hippocampus – a key region of the brain involved in learning and memory. It also encourages mitochondria to become more numerous and more efficient. We often imagine we're training our bodies; we're also strengthening the ancient energy system that allows our brains to work.

Sleep performs a different kind of maintenance. While we're unconscious, the brain is astonishingly busy. Memories are consolidated and worn-out cellular components – including mitochondria – are repaired or replaced. So rather than thinking of sleep as simply rest, we can conceive of it, partly, as a mitochondrial maintenance shift, aimed at preparing the brain for another day of learning, adapting and imagining.

Then there's food. Mitochondria rely entirely on what we eat to perform their remarkable chemistry. The quality of that fuel matters. Diets rich in minimally processed foods provide the ingredients for efficient energy transformation, while diets that continually overwhelm the system appear to make that process less efficient over time.

Seen through this lens, sleep, exercise and diet stop looking like three separate pieces of lifestyle advice and become different ways of caring for the same biological inheritance. What fascinates me most is that this new understanding reaches far beyond physical health. Scientists are uncovering intriguing links between mitochondrial function and resilience, mood, personality traits, and even our social lives.

For centuries we've tended to separate mind from body, as though thoughts somehow floated free of the flesh that produced them. The reality is that thoughts emerge from living tissue that must constantly capture, transform and use energy simply to exist.

The mitochondrial psychobiologist Martin Picard has argued that we've become accustomed to thinking of ourselves as molecular machines, when it may be more useful to think of ourselves as energetic processes. The brain is an organ whose every thought, memory and feeling depends on the continuous transformation of energy within billions of cells.

Seen this way, sleep is no longer simply rest, and exercise is no longer simply fitness. Food is no longer simply fuel. They're different ways of sustaining the ancient biological partnership that allows our bodies – and our minds – to flourish.

It's remarkable to think that every idea you've ever had, every problem you've solved, every person you've loved and every hope you've held has depended upon an alliance forged more than 2bn years ago. The tiny descendants of that ancient bacterium have been quietly working inside us ever since, making possible not just movement or metabolism but thought itself.

Perhaps that's why the oldest health advice has survived every new scientific fashion. Long before we knew about ATP, oxidative phosphorylation or mitochondria, we recognised that people who slept well, moved regularly and ate nourishing food tended to flourish. We're finally beginning to understand why.

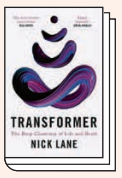
Hannah Critchlow is a neuroscientist and author of The 21st Century Brain (Torva).

Further reading

Three books for a deeper dive

The Song of the Cell
Siddhartha Mukherjee
VINTAGE, £14.99

Transformer
Nick Lane
PROFILE, £14.99



How Life Works
Philip Ball
PICADOR, £14.99

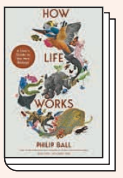


Illustration: Elia Barbieri

MANDARIN STONE

NATURAL STONE
PORCELAIN
& DECORATIVE TILES

mandarinstone.com

BLIND DATE
He said he didn't like my outfit
PAGE 62

HELP!
My partner shouts at other drivers
PAGE 64

HEALTH
Do you need to detox your scalp?
PAGE 67

TRAVEL
Britain's best rivers: from the Tay to the Dart
PAGE 72

LIFESTYLE

FORGET THE FRIDGE MAGNET

What travel experts buy abroad

From mint tea in Morocco to tech in Tokyo, finding treasures to bring home is part of the fun of travel. Here, experts share their tips on what to buy where

Words: Hannah Coates

Clothing

Evil-eye bracelets
Have you even been to Greece and not come home with at least one evil eye **1** hanging from your wrist or ankle? I know it's officially summer when mine is back on my arm.
Lucy Williams, stylist and content creator

Luxury scarves and shirts
I always buy a scarf from Hermès and a Charvet shirt or two **2** in France – plus socks from Mes Chaussettes Rouges and Tabio, because they personalise with embroidery.
Kate Berry, US editor at Cabana magazine

Chic but cheap childrenswear
Nowhere in the world gives you as much chic for your money as the childrenswear department at French store Monoprix **3**. Think Bonpoint vibes at H&M prices. When my kids were little, I'd stock up every Paris fashion week, but there are branches all over France. They also do the most beautiful paper napkins which – being inexpensive, small and lightweight – make the perfect gifts to bring home.
Jess Cartner-Morley, Guardian fashion editor

Vintage jackets
Whenever I'm in Paris, I always make time for Skat Vintage and, if it's the weekend, a wander around Saint-Ouen flea market. I can rarely resist a vintage silk scarf or jacket, although they're often claimed by my daughter before they make it into my wardrobe.
Natasha Shafi, CEO at Mr & Mrs Smith

Food

Macarons
Controversial opinion: Ladurée macarons, with their charming pistachio-green boxes, are not, in fact, the finest macarons in Paris. For those, head to Carette.
The flavours are a little punchier (my favourite is salted caramel), the filling is more generous, and at about €3 (£2.55) apiece, they make the perfect sweet treat for the journey home **4**.
Jess Cartner-Morley

Local spirits
I buy alcohol from pretty much every country I visit. Looking at my collection, I have gin from Eritrea and Botswana **5**, local spirits from Tanzania, and even a bottle from Laos with some sort of worm in it. I don't actually open a lot of them – I just love having them there as memories of different places. If I'm travelling to a big wine-producing country, such as South Africa or Italy, I always bring a special wine suitcase with me, which holds 12 bottles.
Jessica Nabongo, travel writer

Makrut lime leaves
Visiting Bangkok's many markets (there's one for everything) is always a highlight of a trip to Thailand. Phra Khanong is where local people buy their groceries. There are no tourists, it's very affordable and the vendors are friendly. I always pick up my annual supply of makrut lime leaves **6** for 50 baht (about £1) there.
Kash Bhattacharya, travel blogger

Herbal tea
I love discovering local teas wherever I travel, whether it's Moroccan mint, Japanese green or herbal blends I've never come across at home. I gave up coffee last year, and since then, tea – particularly matcha from Kyoto **7**, which is really strong – has become my daily ritual.
Adrienne Adhami, wellbeing coach and podcast host

Extra virgin olive oil
I always come home with something edible. In Greece, Italy or Portugal, that's usually a bottle of exceptional olive oil **8** – often locally pressed – or a few bottles of the local wine we discovered over dinner and want to enjoy again once we're home.
Natasha Shafi

Armagnac prunes
I grew up in the Gers region of south-west France, which is famous for preserving prunes in armagnac, so I always try to bring a jar of them **9** back from the local Château de Cassaigne. They come in these lovely tall glass jars and make the most delicious after-supper treat.
Patrick Williams, interior designer and founder of Berdoulat

Swedish gummies
Whenever I'm in Stockholm, I stock up on soft, chewy pick-and-mix sweets **10** from any grocery store, such as Hemköp – they have big bins of them. Not just a packet or two – but a whole carry-on case full of them.
Kate Berry

Spanish olives
When in Spain, I always come home with *aceitunas gazpachas* **11** – these split manzanilla or hojiblanca olives are marinated with pickles and spices, and they're completely addictive. I stock up in local organic food shops, which tend to have the best selection.
Phillippa Fern Kenyon Shutes, private chef

Coffee beans
I always start my day with a pour-over coffee, so I make sure to stock up on beans **12** whenever I travel. I like ones from Ethiopia or Kenya, especially when they've been naturally fermented, as they tend to have a lovely fruitiness and acidity, with notes of strawberry, candied orange peel or pineapple. Once I get home, I freeze the beans to preserve their freshness.
Patricia Zhou, choreographer

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Beauty

French pharmacy moisturiser
French pharmacies are treasure troves. I always stock up on Ducray Ictyane emollient cream **13**. It's cheap as chips, and the one product that doesn't leave my husband's skin feeling tight.
Teresa Tarmey, facialist

Colgate Wisps
These little on-the-go toothbrushes **14** are one of my must-buys whenever I'm in the US. They're perfect for travel.
Natasha Sullivan, cabin crew

Melatonin
I stock up at a CVS pharmacy whenever I travel to the US. I'm a good sleeper, but for those rare nights when I'm not, their over-the-counter melatonin **15** is a lifesaver. CVS is also the best place to find brilliant little beauty buys you can't get at home – such as Pacha Soap Co's natural deodorant.
Teresa Tarmey

Artisan candles
If you're passing through Athens, you have to pick up something from The Naxos Apothecary **16**. They make the most beautiful artisan candles, body products and fragrances.
Lucy Williams

Handmade razors
In Italy, I seek out traditional men's toiletries shops and usually come home with a handmade razor, brush or pair of scissors. Italians do things like this so well: practical, timeless, made to last.
Kate Berry

New York pharmacy favourites
I grew up near Zitomer pharmacy in New York City. There are two floors filled with all my favourite brands, such as Augustinus Bader and 111Skin. Whenever I go back, I always pick up a Mason Pearson comb or brush.
Imogen Kwok, chef

Pudin Hara
In India, Pudin Hara **17** is a traditional ayurvedic formulation. It's a bright green blend of mint extract and peppermint oil that works quickly to ease all kinds of tummy-related issues, from cramps and acidity to bloating and indigestion.
Divia Thani, global editorial director at Condé Nast Traveller

Continental colognes
The first time I went to Spain, I remember catching a distinctive waft of cologne whenever I passed a suit on their way into their office in Barcelona. It was different from the muscular scents of home at the time; light, summery and somewhat continental. I finally plucked up the courage to ask someone what they were wearing, and it turned out to be Nenuco Agua de Colonia **18**. Now I buy it whenever I go to Spain and literally bathe in it because it only costs a few euros. A Spanish friend recently told me, however, that it's mostly used for babies. In France, I always buy Le Petit Marseillais Lait shower gel **19** for the same olfactory associations with summer beaches.
Andy Pietrasik, Guardian travel editor

White flower oil
I always pick up this oil from Hong Kong **20**. With menthol, eucalyptus and wintergreen, it provides instant relief from headaches and insect bites, and even helps clear the sinuses. Just dot a few drops on your wrists, temples and behind the ears.
Divia Thani

Natural deodorant
I recently discovered the fragrance store Zielinski & Rozen in Amsterdam and fell in love with their natural antiperspirant. I'm drawn to the scent of essential oils, so now I always hunt one down when I come across their boutiques.
Phillippa Fern

Homewares

Antique buttons and baskets
I always make a point of visiting the local flea market wherever I go – I can't resist picking up exquisitely made antique buttons **21** to sew on to clothes, as well as old picture frames. I'll also always find a way to bring home a couple of baskets – the safest way is in a large plastic striped market bag with a good shoulder strap. I love that almost every culture around the world has its own tradition of weaving with natural materials.
Hikari Yokoyama, founder of design studio Naum House

Vintage digestif glasses
I rarely come home from a trip without a tiny glass **22** and a bottle of whatever the country is best known for. The glass usually comes from a market or dusty antique shop, and the bottle is always something local that's hard to find at home. I last picked up a Manuel Vermouth while in Biarritz.
Kirthanaa Naidu, stylist, cook and creative producer

Jugs and bowls
Sifnos is known as Greece's ceramics island, thanks to its abundant clay supply, and it is home to some incredible potteries that have been producing pieces for generations. Up in Cheronissos Bay, you'll find Kostas Depastas, who still uses a foot-operated wheel. He brings his love of engineering to his work, cleverly designing jugs and bowls alongside simple, spiral-decorated pieces.
Lucy Williams

Silicone baking mats
E Dehillerin in Paris has every kitchen tool you could possibly imagine, especially for desserts and pastry. Their own-brand silpats (silicone baking mats) are my favourite – chic green and white. I have about 10 in different sizes.
Imogen Kwok

Rugs
We're often in Istanbul visiting my wife's family, and I always make time for Şişli's Feriköy flea market. You can find all sorts of treasures there, including beautiful rugs **23** at incredibly affordable prices.
Patrick Williams

Vases and other ceramics
You have to hunt around Marrakech's souks, but that's part of the fun. I've brought back beautifully coloured vases – which I use as carafes – and mugs. I love LRNCE studio, which brings together textiles, art and ceramics **24**, with a use of colour that feels subtle and distinctive.
Lucinda Chambers, co-founder of fashion curation site Collagerie

Luxurious sheets
As soon as I set foot in Paris, I head to Merci. The store was the first to make washed bed linen **25** and napkins feel truly beautiful. Over the years, I've slowly added to my collection, so now I've got almost every shade.
Lucinda Chambers

Art materials
In Milan, I came across Pellegrini Brera art shop after visiting the Pinacoteca di Brera, and now I go back every time I'm there. They have these brilliant architecture drafting stencils, which I use when putting together proposals for food installations – perfect for when I need a break from the computer.
Imogen Kwok

Secondhand cameras
A highlight of any Tokyo trip has to be a visit to the Akihabara district – you feel like you've stepped into the future. There's an abundance of used camera shops, and at Camera Kitamura I've picked up a mint condition, secondhand Fujifilm X10 **26** at half the usual price. Lemon Camera and Imtiaz's Camera Market are also great places to hunt for a bargain.
Kash Bhattacharya

MATCHMAKING GUARDIAN READERS SINCE 2009

'I jokingly asked him for a compliment on my outfit and he said he didn't really like it'

Blind Date

Imogen
31, doctor

What were you hoping for?
Something to tell the group chat that would elicit more :o reactions than usual.

First impressions?
Polite, nice hands, early.

What did you talk about?
We covered most of the world's topics, my favourite being whether having an AI boyfriend is functionally the same as being in a long-distance relationship (I admit that was slight rage bait).

Most awkward moment?
I jokingly asked for a compliment on my outfit and he said he didn't really like it. I told him white lies exist for a reason ...

Good table manners?
Excellent - my water glass was never empty and our food was always perfectly shared down the middle. (By the way, best roast of my life.)

Best thing about Andy?
An unparalleled debate partner who called me out when he disagreed with me (which I appreciated).

Would you introduce Andy to your friends?
My single ones would love him.

Describe Andy in three words
Witty, self-aware, circumspect.

What do you think Andy made of you?
He swore he wasn't, but I felt as if he might have been a bit overwhelmed by me - especially when I asked what his dream wedding would look like.

Did you go on somewhere?
We went to the pub, then threw sticks for his dog Bella in the park (11/10 for her).

And ... did you kiss?
Cheek only.

If you could change one thing about the evening what would it be?
Make it 5C cooler so I didn't have to fan myself like an aghast Victorian maiden.

Marks out of 10?
6.6.

Would you meet again?
To debate, or to dog-walk.

Andy
36, consultancy firm founder

What were you hoping for?
To be able to say, "You'll never guess how we met."

First impressions?
What a whirlwind.

What did you talk about?
Living abroad and learning languages. Tarot cards. The joy of dancing. The insufficiency of men. Autism.

Most awkward moment?
When Imogen asked why I hadn't complimented her outfit.

Good table manners?
Flawless - glasses were attended at all times, swear words used only at appropriate points, all waiting staff were treated with admiration.

Best thing about Imogen?
Her openness and love of all things strange and interesting.

Would you introduce Imogen to your friends?
Yes.

Describe Imogen in three words
Charismatic, intelligent, direct.

What do you think Imogen made of you?
She told me I was a nerd, and we related in our passion for various things novel and brave - so an adventurous nerd?

Did you go on somewhere?
We did - to a pub, and then for a walk.

And ... did you kiss?
On the cheek.

If you could change one thing about the evening what would it be?
I'd have complimented her outfit.

Marks out of 10?
8.

Would you meet again?
I think Imogen could probably make anything a party, so yes.

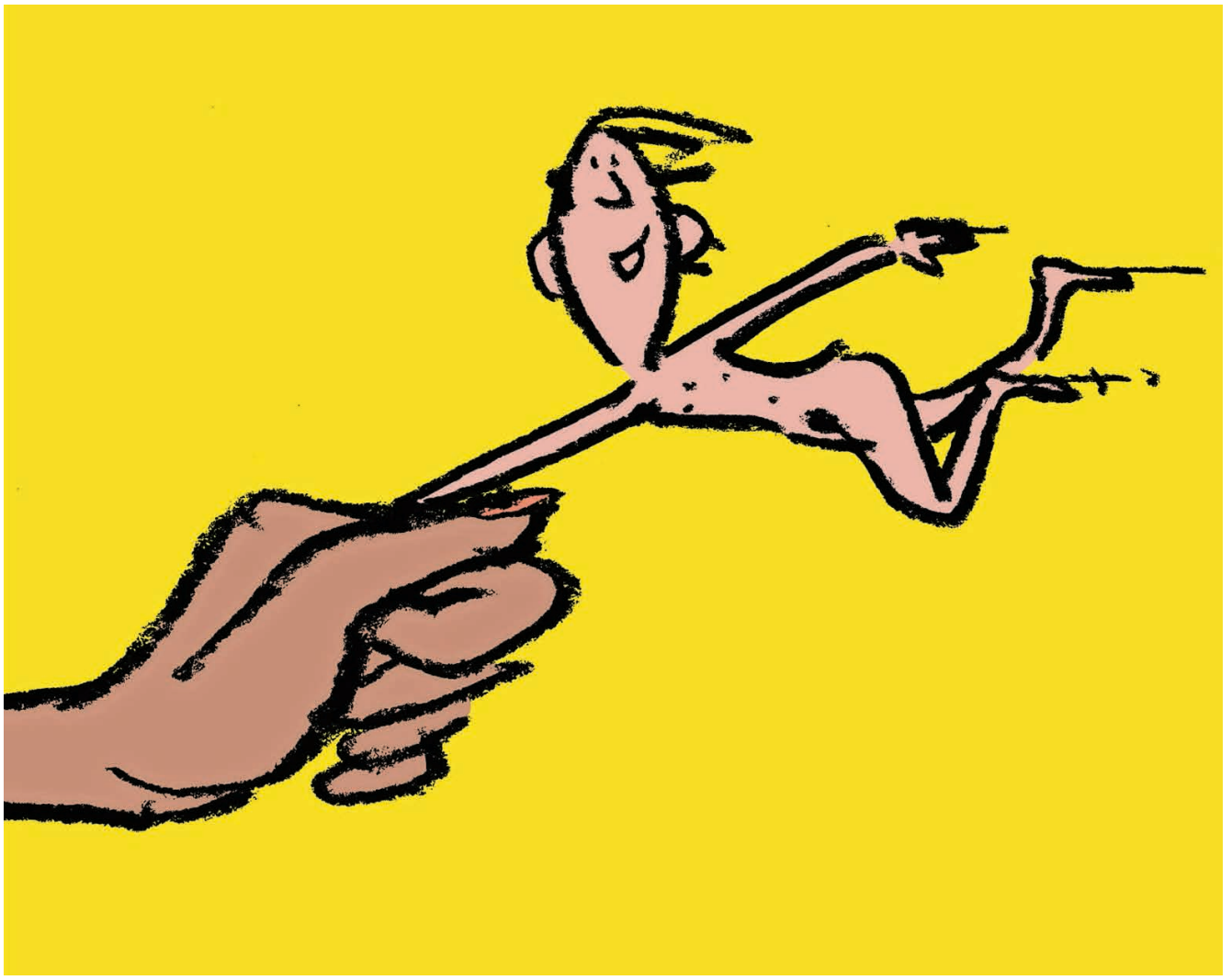
Imogen and Andy ate at Wilson's, London, SE13. Fancy a blind date? Email blind.date@theguardian.com

LINDA NYLIND, ANTONIO OLMOS/THE GUARDIAN

TRUE STORIES OF OUR SEX LIVES

This is how we do it

'Since I started HRT, we've switched roles – he jokes that I want to do it every day'



Antonia, 56

Rob and I have been together for 33 years but, weirdly, the past 18 months have been the peak of our sex life for me. It took me threatening to file for divorce to bring us back from the brink.

If someone told me that the gangly 6ft 6in spotty young man I met on the first day of university was going to be my husband and the father of my children, I wouldn't have believed it, but that's what happened. I was drawn towards the dangerous types in leather jackets, but Rob is more like a ginormous teddy bear. By the time we hooked up in second year, we were such good friends that our relationship felt like putting on a pair of comfy slippers. It was so easy, we were two puzzle pieces that slotted together. Our sex life was pretty regular for years - normal, loving, safe.

It's hard to pinpoint when something breaks. But the perfect storm of work stress, menopause and raising kids meant that our sex life slowly slipped out of view. I'd be racked with guilt, but couldn't find it in myself to initiate.

Ironically, it was when I started taking testosterone as part of hormone replacement therapy that I started feeling like a woman again. We have a super king-size bed, and for years we slept on opposite sides, not even touching. But three months after starting the testosterone, I said to Rob: "I want you in bed now."

Now, I initiate more than Rob. We've completely switched roles. He often jokes that I want to do it every day - which is not true - but what I love is that we now get to enjoy little moments of intimacy every day. When we have sex, he knows a slower rhythm will bring me to completion. He will wait until I've orgasmed and then I will finish him off.

The closeness of our intimate life and personal relationship are linked. I try to give less weight to the things that annoy me and celebrate the positive parts of our marriage, and the revival of our sex life has brought our relationship back to its roots. Rob tells me I'm wrong about this, but I think now we have sex more, we bicker less.

Rob, 55

There have been moments when I thought our marriage wasn't going to make it. It wasn't only down to the sexless periods, but also the absence of feeling loved and part of a team.

I like to joke that I noticed Antonia when she was walking away because she has a really beautiful bum. I've always called her my "peachy fruit salad", as she has such peachy breasts. But when we had children, sex became a bit of a chore. Life was busy, and by the time we got to bed, all we wanted to do was sleep. I did grow frustrated when she seemed to stop craving sex at all. She would promise we would do it another day, but it never materialised. Now she's been prescribed testosterone it's a helpful indication that the menopausal woman you're living with - who can fly off the handle at the drop of the hat - still likes you.

Before, our sex life was quite vanilla - often missionary. But within a week of starting the testosterone, she was wanting it all the time. It was like I had married a new woman. One issue is that we crave it at different times of the day. In the evening, she's often asking, "Do you fancy a shag?" I am normally knackered and reply, "In the morning, I promise!" She needs a slower rhythm to help her reach completion, and sometimes I am too tired to do the whole routine, whereas I often orgasm from oral sex.

It helps that Antonia is more open and imaginative nowadays. On a recent holiday to Italy, we carried out a little experiment: I watched porn to get me going, which meant we both orgasmed during penetrative sex. It helped that I had already reached a certain level of arousal that I could carry on from.

Although our intimate life has experienced this recent revival, I wouldn't say we bicker any less, there is just more of the good stuff too.

As told to Elena Angelides

Would you and your partner like to share the story, anonymously, of your sex life? Email sexlives@theguardian.com with a few words about what you get up to

Illustration: Ryan Gillett

You be the judge

My partner angrily confronts bad drivers. Should he calm down?

Interviews: Georgina Lawton

The prosecution

Riya

Every time Declan chooses kicking off over de-escalation, he compromises our safety

My boyfriend, Declan, has bad road rage. In day-to-day life he is mild-mannered. But the roads in London, where we live, seem to transform him, and he gets a kick out of being heard.

I've watched him go from perfectly calm to furious in seconds, and swear at people for cutting him up or for driving aggressively. Most of the time I agree that the other driver is in the wrong. But being right doesn't make confronting strangers a sensible idea.

I grew up in London and people are insane on the roads here. But I don't ever respond because I like to save my energy. I don't think shouting back or getting out of the car ever helps.

As a woman of colour, I also don't have the privilege of reacting when I'm by myself because it's not safe, whereas Declan is a 6ft 3in white man.

When people cut us up, beep impatiently or drive as though they're the only person that matters, it can be scary or infuriating, but Declan just goes off on one.

The worst incident happened when another driver dangerously overtook us. Declan accelerated to catch up with them at the traffic lights and shouted through the window about how reckless they'd been. The other driver got out of his car and kicked off. Thankfully, after I shouted at Declan to drive away, he did. Afterwards, I was furious – he'd turned an annoying situation into a big confrontation that could have ended badly.

Another time, after a driver flipped me off, Declan started yelling again. I know he was trying to defend me, but I don't need defending if it means putting us both at risk. Every time Declan chooses confrontation over de-escalation, he compromises our safety over a stranger's bad behaviour.

Declan is a great partner and we usually see eye to eye when it comes to how to handle conflict. He just has a strong sense of injustice, which seems to come out on the roads. I know he likes to be vindicated, but I'd prefer him to let it go.

The defence
Declan
I don't believe people should get away with dangerous or disrespectful driving

Riya and I have fundamentally different approaches when it comes to driving. I don't lose my temper for no reason, I react when people behave recklessly. Unfortunately that happens a lot in London.

I don't believe people should get away with dangerous or disrespectful driving. Why should the person in the wrong get to drive off thinking their behaviour is acceptable?

The incident with the driver who dangerously overtook us proves my point. They could have caused a serious accident. Impatient people like that are a danger to everyone. I caught up with him at the lights because I wanted him to know he'd put lives at risk, not because I was looking for a fight. Yes, he got out of his car, but as soon as it became clear things were escalating, I drove away. If I'd wanted a confrontation, I would have got out of the car, but I didn't want to put our lives in danger.

My frustration comes from seeing people behave selfishly and never face any consequences. I know I can't police the roads, but I don't think calling someone out automatically makes me irrational or angry.

The same goes for people being rude to Riya. If someone shouts abuse or makes an aggressive gesture, my instinct is to stand up for her, so why do I get called angry? I'd rather she knew I'd defend her than sit silently while someone treats her badly.

Could I express myself more calmly? Probably. I'll admit I can get heated in the moment. I never start it or go looking for fights, but I do like to have the last word. I could be less reactive. But I think Riya overlooks the fact that I'm reacting to bad behaviour rather than causing the problems myself. There's a difference between someone making an honest mistake and someone driving dangerously.

It's unfair to label me as someone with road rage. I don't drive aggressively or intimidate other motorists. I'm a careful, competent driver who gets frustrated when other people put lives at risk.

The jury
of Guardian readers

Should Declan put the brakes on his motormouth?

Putting his girlfriend at risk isn't protecting her, and Declan's road rage isn't making roads safer. Riya is telling him his behaviour makes her feel unsafe, but he doesn't listen, which seems to indicate it's more about ego than justice. Declan needs to think about the irony of his justifications.
Paula, 43

I get Declan's frustration; there are too many bad drivers. But he needs to respect Riya's feelings – she's uncomfortable – and rein it in when they're in the car together. Justified or not, Declan is directing his anger at people who don't care and Riya's feelings are more important.
Lucille, 55

The incident at the traffic lights shows what can happen. Taking out his frustrations might be therapeutic for Declan in the moment, but if it escalates into confrontation he (and Riya) could come off worse …
Katherine, 52

Declan says he wants to defend Riya, but he sped them both into a confrontation in the worst incident. Angry men are scary in a way I suspect most other men don't appreciate – Declan must listen to Riya and cool his temper.
Kathryn, 40

If Declan behaves the way he does on the road because he cares about Riya, then he should listen to what she wants. Staying in your car does not necessarily mean that you are behaving well.
Lucy, 34

THE VERDICT

Guilty	Stop pouring fuel on the fire, Declan	5
Not guilty	All he's askin' is a little respect, Riya	0

You've heard the cases, now you decide …
Scan to vote on this week's dispute, share your own, or be one of the jury

My husband won't make any effort to please me in bed

Ask
Annalisa Barbieri

My husband and I have been together for six years. He is 60, 20 years older than me. We had a baby last year and went through a really difficult time in our relationship. Things are better after some couples therapy, but we are both still unhappy with our sex life.

I take a while to orgasm, and he gets very impatient and essentially just gives up (he always orgasms first, and quickly). I also have longstanding health issues that make sex painful. He has always been respectful when I say I can't have sex because of the pain. But he gets defensive and unkind when I ask him to try new things to give me pleasure. He bought sex toys and says these were his way of trying, but I saw them as a way of him passing off a job he can't be bothered to do.

He recently told me he has been the lover to "lots of" women. I am wondering if he saw himself as the pleasure-giver to those women, rather than their husbands, and that he has now, subconsciously, transferred that into our marriage.

He says he had a lot of sex before we met, so has sort of resigned himself to masturbation (I'm not willing to accept that). But he says he wishes I would feel pleasure and that I deserve it. He has suggested me sleeping with other men – as long as I don't tell him about it. While I would consider non-monogamy if it was the only option, I wouldn't want to be sneaking around.

I had an active sex life before we met, and it was never just about orgasms – it was about the anticipation, and feeling sexy, wanted and emotionally bonded. I'd love that with my husband.

I think you've hit on something: your husband has been used to being the lover of women without any of the responsibilities attached. Now, he's a husband, which is a different ballgame. I'd be interested to know how long ago the last of these "relationships" was and why he decided to settle down.

I went to sex and relationship psychotherapist Silva Neves. "It sounds as if the sexual problem is to do with connection," he said. "It's important for a good sex life to want to get to know our partner's body, what turns them on, how they like to be touched. But it sounds like there is little interest or curiosity from your husband."

Neves felt this could be "to do with ageing, or maybe he has low energy or low testosterone. It doesn't sound like he doesn't care about you, more that he doesn't think he can meet your sexual needs. It may be worth having some proper conversations about that so you can understand what is behind his lack of interest."

You could have an open relationship, but that is on your husband's terms again, isn't it? Neves wondered if you could "keep a loving relationship by not putting pressure on yourselves to make sex work, and meet that need elsewhere"? On the other hand, he said, couples can navigate the changes that happen with ageing or after having a baby if both make efforts to adapt. "One way to start is to step outside the usual sexual scripts: I 'should' do this, he 'should' do that. Instead, how about going back to the drawing board and figuring out a whole new sexual menu together?"

If your husband really won't engage, that in itself is an answer. Sex often shows cracks in relationships to which we want to turn a blind eye. It doesn't sound as if you two have ever been sexually compatible. Given the paucity of other details about how you get on, I have to ask: what is worth saving here and do you really want to?

If you would like advice on a personal matter, email ask.annalisa@theguardian.com. See guardian.com/letters-terms for terms and conditions

Illustration: Igor Bastidas

Need some thrifty tailoring? Try your local dry cleaner

STYLIST'S ASSISTANT: CHARLOTTE GORNALL. GROOMING BY ALICE THEOBALD @ARLINGTONARTISTS USING MAKEUP BY MAC AND ENVIRON SKINCARE. TROUSERS, STEPHEN'S OWN, £30, BEYOND RETRO. SHIRT, £160, MITHRIDATE. NECKLACE, £230, AND RING, £215, BOTH SERGE DENIMES. TRAINERS, £150, ONITSUKA TIGER

Stephen Libby
On trends

When I started shopping in vintage stores, I fell into the trap of thinking that if something wasn't in my size there was nothing to be done. I'd still buy beautiful shirts that were huge, but never end up wearing them. I persevered with trousers that were three sizes too big and just scrunched in the waist with a belt, but it didn't look good. Now I know that a belt is an accessory, not a necessity; it's there to heighten the garment, not hold it up. And that's because I have finally understood the power of tailoring.

Tailoring seems out of reach for most people, but more often than not a dry cleaner will be able to take in a waist or do the hem, which would set you back £30 max. And I mean, how much would you pay for a perfectly fitting pair of trousers?

I started with a few items in my wardrobe that I loved but hadn't been able to wear, and I suggest you do the same if this is your first go. You already know you love it, and you've already paid for it, so the incentive is there.

The first thing was a pair of trousers I hadn't worn in years. The dry cleaner took me out back, measured me and made me try the trousers on. All they needed was to take down the hem. This happens a lot to me as I have long legs and a lot of trousers sit around my ankles. In the Outer Hebrides, we say it looks like your cat died because your trousers are flying at half mast. The good thing about vintage clothing is that it often has generous hems. The dry cleaner just pinned in the waist, tightened it round my bum, and two days – and £20 – later I had a new pair of trousers.

You don't just end up with a piece of clothing in your size, you end up with something specifically for your body. Who among us is an exact high-street size anyway?

Alterations was more common in the 80s and 90s. People always had the sewing machine out and altering clothes was the norm. If we don't know how to do it ourselves, I think we should make peace with the idea of outsourcing that to someone else. To that end, it's worth checking the hems, the waistband and for extra fabric on the seam down the bum. If you take an item of clothing and look inside, it's easy to assess if it has already been altered. I had another pair of trousers where you could see 4in of fabric had been taken in round the waist, so I took them in to be tailored again – boom, another pair of perfect trousers.

I always get shirts tailored when I want something smarter to sit under a suit (they can easily take them in at the side). I also love cropped jackets. One of my favourite alterations is a suit jacket cropped into a bolero-style shape that sits just above the hip. It's not just about adapting something to fit, you can actually create a whole new look. I once got a jumpsuit almost entirely rebuilt – they had to remove the zip, cut the torso and shorten it – and it cost £80. But it was worth it.

A few things I've learned along the way. I don't safety pin things before I go in. I simply go and get them to measure me. Find someone you trust. They'll get to know your style and shape. It's intimate, but you can form a relationship. I now go once a month. I would also recommend not cropping your own clothes using wonderweb. I did this with a lovely jacket. It held together for the wedding I was going to, but when I took it to my dry cleaner they were pretty horrified that I'd tried to "web it". They ripped it off without a word and altered it properly.

Obviously I care about the planet and try to make sustainable choices, but I'm not telling people to tailor vintage clothing from up on my soapbox. The onus to do better is on larger corporations, not consumers. I'm just trying to get people to realise they have more choice in vintage shops than they think.

Jess Cartner-Morley is away

Photography: David Newby. Styling: Sam Deaman

A shortcut to glass skin? Try these new one-step moisturisers

Sali Hughes
On beauty

As you will no doubt have noticed, "glass" skin – that is, a complexion with a smooth, glazed sort of sheen – has been fashionable for ages. Until now, however, it has only come as the result of a meticulous, umpteen-step Korean skincare routine. But the new glass skin moisturisers attempt to mimic the look in one simple application.

Erborian's **Glow Moisturiser** (from £9, all skin types) is a Goldilocks's porridge sort of face cream. Not too heavy, not too light, just dewy enough without looking oily, and with lasting hydration that never becomes wet. I must advise the glimmer-avoidant that it does have a smidge of pearlescence, but I find that flattering.

Mac's **Faceglass Hydrating Skin Gloss** (£30) is, as you might expect from an artistry brand, a more definite "look". I've rarely changed my mind about a product so quickly. On first application, I found the cloudy gel

I've rarely changed my mind about a product so quickly. It went on sticky and stiff – but then transformed

sticky and stiff, but seconds later it behaved very differently – smooth, spreadable and silky, with a lasting, glitter-free reflection. It gives true – not just cosmetic – skin hydration, thanks to a heavy load of glycerin and squalane, and while it has a strong fruity scent, it doesn't have that jammy teenage lipgloss finish. Makeup goes over it nicely, and the more I experimented, the more versatile I found it. This is more than an-all over moisturiser – it can be applied locally to cheekbones, brow bones and lips, and its thickness prevents unwanted migration to other areas.

One of this summer's most impressive launches is Rhode's "luminizing" **Highlight Milk** (£28), a liquid moisturiser I use often as a last layer before sunscreen. Unlike the bestselling colourless original, Glazing Milk, this version is tinted (there are four shades that between them cover everyone). The two are otherwise identical – soothing, milky moisture with a glazed-doughnut sort of finish. I love shade 02 so much I've been dispensing with foundation altogether.

I've recommended it before, but it bears repeating: L'Oreal Paris's **Revitalift Filler Glass Skin Face Moisturiser** (£17.99, but frequently on offer) gives a subtle glassy sheen for those who don't want to overcommit. It's a milky serum that hydrates, plumps and leaves just enough dewiness so you look vital and healthy without ever seeming sweaty or sticky. I find a matte-ish makeup over the top looks more natural and effortless for it, and even dry skin stays lubricated. It's a terrific – but oddly overlooked – buy.

Is it true that ...
You need to detox your scalp?

We're experiencing the "skinification" of the scalp, says Desmond Tobin, professor of dermatological science at University College Dublin. After decades of consumer obsession with improving the quality of facial skin, attention is now being turned to our heads.

A wave of products have launched – from scalp scrubs and acid exfoliants to deep-cleaning shampoos – claiming to "detox" the scalp and promising everything from shinier hair to boosted growth.

"It's obviously a business opportunity," says Tobin. "If brands have something that works on skin, they might be able to roll it over. It goes quickly and cheaply into another product range."

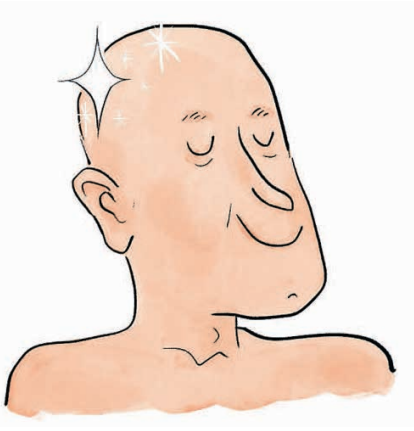
Tobin says he'd never use the word "detox", because the process these products are helping does not remove anything toxic in the dangerous sense. But an occasional scalp cleanse can be useful for some of us, he says.

"Some people throw so much product on their hair that some of it is likely to build up, not only on the hair, but also on the scalp. This could clog the hair follicle openings and interfere with optimal hair growth. It's quite possible that a quick shower in the morning might not remove everything."

This is especially possible in hard water areas where minerals in the water can react with products to form a sticky residue. Tobin adds that people who live in highly polluted urban areas could also have deposits of traffic-associated chemicals on their scalps.

Tobin says you may not need to buy an expensive product to deep clean your scalp. He advises people in hard water areas to use a sulfate-free high-lather shampoo or to double-shampoo to break down mineral and product buildup."

Kate Lloyd



Photography: Kellie French. Illustration: Becky Barnicoat

Fancy fresh cabbages next spring? Then it's time to get sowing

Claire Ratinon
On vegetables

If you told primary-school-age me that I'd one day love cabbage, I would have laughed and called you a liar. Despite how much school dinners tried to put me – and likely, you – off this green-leafed staple, I'm happy to say that my taste has been rehabilitated. Yet, for all the love I have for the humble cabbage, it is not a crop I grow. And it is for the same reason that lots of grow-your-own classics don't make it on to my plot: I don't have enough space. For a vegetable that is so inexpensive and ubiquitous, I simply can't justify it.

But if you're fortunate enough to have a decent-sized patch – or just a strong desire to grow cabbages – then it's a good time to get them started. Spring cabbages sown now – in good quality sowing compost in a modular tray – will grow swiftly in summer's ideal conditions. They will then overwinter in the ground all the way through to next spring, when they will be ready to pick.

There are plenty of brassica-hungry creatures around – from butterflies to pigeons – so I'd advise potting young cabbage plants on and keeping them protected until they are sturdy enough to survive a bit of munching. Even when they are ready to go in the ground, I'd use insect-proof mesh to protect them. Appropriate spacing is also important – 30-40cm between plants, depending on the variety – so they have room to grow, plus you can monitor their progress much more easily. If you do plant spring cabbages (like 'Duncan', *pictured*) closer together, harvest some as spring greens and leave the remainder to keep growing until they develop into full heads.

From seed to harvest, spring cabbages – grown in plenty of sun and nutrient rich, well-draining soil – take around six months to reach maturity. This is another important consideration when deciding whether to dedicate an area to this delicious but time- and space-hungry crop.

They are edible from the off, so you could grow cabbages as microgreens should that interest you

It is quite possible to grow cabbages pretty much year-round. Those ready for harvest in the summer months are sown in late winter or early spring, while autumn cabbages are sown from mid-spring but tend to be large and so need plenty of space. Winter cabbages are on the bigger side too. They're the type that come to harvest when the veg patch is otherwise bare, and they boast a hardiness that can withstand a British winter, so they are poised to be picked as and when they are needed.

My favourite thing about the brassica family to which cabbages belong is that they are edible from the off, so you could grow cabbages as microgreens should that interest you. More helpfully, it means that if you set out to grow cabbages and at any point change your mind, then you can eat what you've grown and call it a day.

Gynelle Leon's
Houseplant hacks

Can willow water act as a rooting hormone?

The problem
Propagation is where good intentions go to die. Sometimes you are rewarded with roots, sometimes not. So the internet offers an organic aid: brew rooting hormone from a willow tree.

The hack
Willow contains indolebutyric acid, auxin (a plant hormone that is the main active ingredient in commercial rooting powders), along with salicylic acid, better known as the basis of aspirin.

The method
Cut a few thin willow twigs, ideally new growth taken in late winter or early spring when the hormone is most concentrated. Strip off any leaves, cut the stems into short pieces and lightly crush them. Then steep them in a jar of boiling or cold water for 24 to 72 hours, until the water takes on a faint colour. Strain out the twigs. Stand your fresh cuttings in the willow water to root.

The test
I made a batch and used it to root pothos and tradescantia cuttings, alongside a control group in plain water. The willow-water cuttings rooted faster. Two of the plain water cuttings grew shorter roots more slowly; the rest went limp.

The verdict
It won't outperform a good commercial hormone on a difficult plant, but willow water is ancient wisdom that works.

OSCAR DARCY/GAP PHOTOS; OKSANA ERMAK/GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

How many electricians does it take to install a car charger?

Tim Dowling
On modern life

On a Wednesday morning the doorbell rings while I'm working in the kitchen. My wife, who is expecting a delivery, opens the door.

"No, I don't want brake pads," she says. I don't hear the reply.

"Because I'm not a garage," my wife says. "Do I look like a garage?"

There actually is a small garage just beyond the end of our back garden. Only a brick wall separates it from my office shed – my days are punctuated by the bright ring of dropped wrenches and the grating whine of power tools.

Because of this proximity, we get a lot of the mechanic's post, and many of his deliveries come to us first. Sometimes it's brake pads; sometimes it's a headlamp unit for an Audi A3. Once I was asked to sign for a smashed-up BMW at 11pm.

We're on friendly terms with the mechanic, so it's in a spirit of neighbourly diplomacy that I walk round with the two shock absorbers I found leaning against my front door on Friday afternoon.

"I was just thinking of ringing your bell," he says.

We chat for a bit about the weather, pausing while someone inside uses an angle grinder.

"So," he says. "I see you've got an electric car now."

"Yeah," I say.

"How's that working out for you?"

I hesitate, because I know he probably doesn't want my full answer. The problem, I explain anyway, is not the car – I like the car – but the fast charging point that still hasn't been installed on my drive.

"You can't just use a regular plug?" he says.

"You can," I say, "but then a full charge takes 36 hours."

"OK," he says, in a tone that does not suggest he can't wait to hear more.

The electrician who came to install the charger, I explain anyway, fell into immediate despair on seeing the proposed route between the fuse box and the installation site. After some passive-aggressive wheedling on my part, he reluctantly agreed to help me lift some floorboards to run the cable. Only then did he inform me I needed remedial electrical work done – bonding, he called it – before he could continue. Then he left.

"Sounds crazy," says the mechanic, his voice carefully stripped of encouragement.

It took three days, I continue anyway, to negotiate a price for the bonding, and another three to secure a second appointment. I changed my plans to ensure I would be home on the day, only for the appointment to be suddenly postponed for a further week, to a date in the middle of my holiday. Finally, with very little remaining goodwill on my part, a fourth installation date was agreed upon.

"And that date," I say, "is next Monday. It's taken two months so far."

My working days are punctuated by the ring of dropped wrenches and the grating whine of power tools

"Well, good luck with it," says the mechanic, waving me off with a raised shock absorber.

That evening a new electrician rings to confirm our Monday appointment. He adds that he's very concerned about the proposed cable route from the fuse box to the installation site.

"The cable's already laid," I tell him. "The other guy did it."

"What other guy?" he says.

"You don't know about the other guy?" I say. "Do you know about the bonding?"

"It's not on my worksheet," he says.

At 8am on Monday my wife lets the new electrician in, and promptly leaves with the dog. I show him where the laid cable runs – under the living room floor and along the side of the house – and wait for him to tell me what's wrong with it.

"No, that's fine," he says.

"What about the bonding?" I say.

"You don't need bonding," he says. "I tested it, and it's all working."

"I don't need bonding?" I say.

When my wife comes home an hour later the electrician is gone, and the charging point is installed. I show her how to control it via the app.

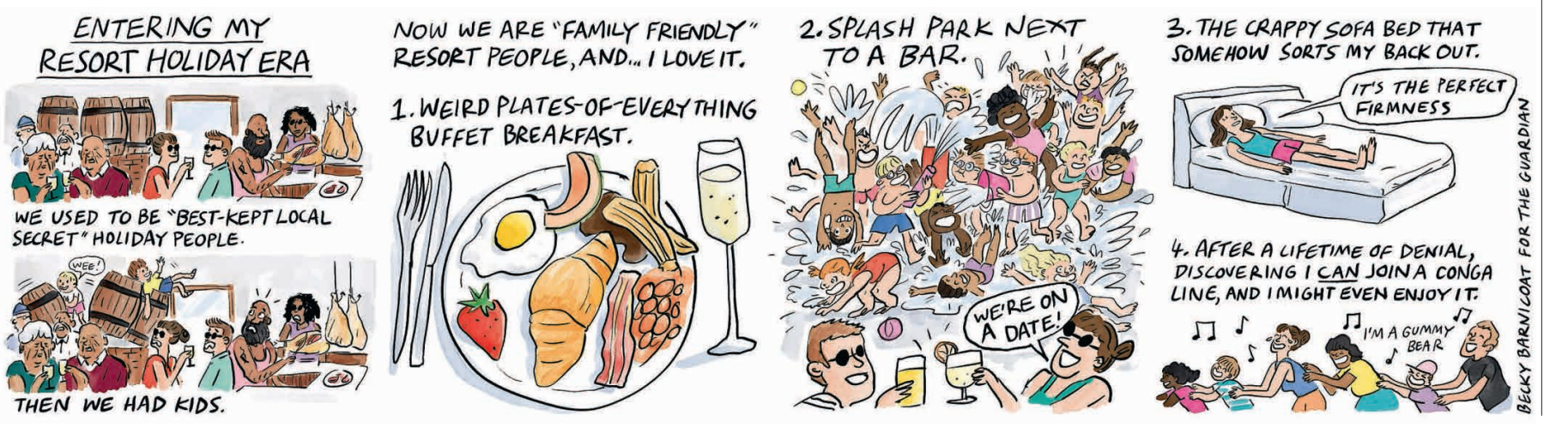
"How do I get the app?" she says.

"I don't know, he did it for me," I say. "In, like, 10 seconds." My phone pings in my hand: an automated message from the charger company, saying that a qualified electrician will be arriving that afternoon.

"Christ," I say.

When the doorbell rings at five I'm half expecting a third electrician with no knowledge of the previous two, but it's just a delivery driver holding an intake manifold.

Becky Barnicoat On millennial life



You don't have to be a sailor to cruise the estuaries of Essex on this historic craft. The skipper will show you the ropes – or just relax and enjoy the ride
Overleaf: five more British river adventures

Sail back in time on a Thames barge

Words: Imogen Lepere

In a darkened room in Maldon, Essex, a ship's lantern illuminates the laundry drying on a web of ropes suspended from the ceiling. Between piles of sailing memorabilia, 86-year-old Barry Pearce is flipping through a yellowing logbook, watched by his mongrel, Winkle. It feels more like a ship's cabin than a terrace house. Pearce is one of a handful of surviving skippers who delivered freight on the Thames by sailing barge, the flat-bottomed trading boats famous for their striking red sails that were endemic to the river's estuary until the 1960s. He remembers the names of every vessel he worked on – Remercie, Edith May, Colonia.

In the 19th century, the ochre sails of thousands of Thames sailing barges pierced the skyline as the craft carried cargo from the Thames estuary and beyond in and out of London. Their shallow draft allowed them to snake far upriver in as little as a metre of water (bargemen would boast that they could sail anywhere there had been a heavy dew). Their ingenious rig, with sails that could be set and stowed with the help of winches, meant around 150 tonnes of cargo could be shifted by just a skipper and mate – often accompanied by a guard dog. This efficiency allowed them to outlive all other commercial sailing vessels, surviving until the 1960s, when Pearce himself took the helm.

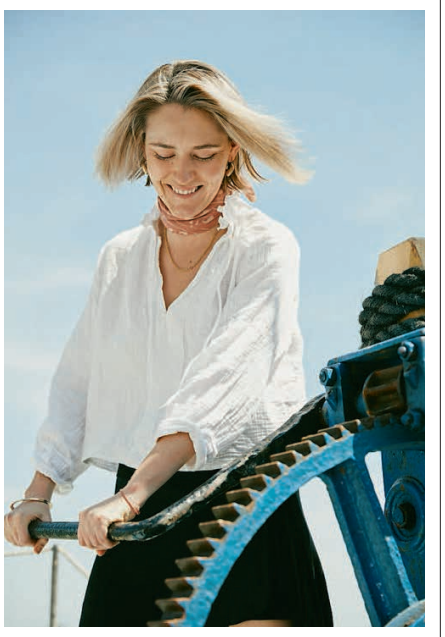
Today, only about 30 Thames barges are still sailing, either as private homes or leisure cruisers. Two of them – Pudge and Centaur – lie like beached krakens on the oozing mud of Maldon's Blackwater estuary. Both are owned by the Thames Sailing Barge Trust, a charity run entirely by volunteers, including Pearce. Every summer, both vessels can be hired as private charters for groups of up to 12, or you can book a berth on one of their one- to three-day public sailing cruises. They also offer events such as children's art days throughout the year.

I'm here on a scorching evening at Hythe quay to spend the weekend exploring the River Blackwater and Essex coast aboard Centaur, a barge built in 1895. Itineraries are flexible and based on passengers' interests. For us it involves sailing up the Blackwater, a Pimm's at Tollesbury Marina, and a swim off Shingle Point and wander around West Mersea on Mersea Island. Our motley crew consists of three trainees overseen by skipper Chris Martin, who teaches boatbuilding at vocational training organisation Circles Alternative Education.

There are also six passengers, ranging in age from 18 to 76, in five cabins, which are basic but comfortable (each has a wash basin). Although I am the only one who is not a competent sailor, Martin makes it clear that

GEOFFREY ROBINSON, RODGER TAMBLYN/BOTH ALAMY; LAURA LEWIS/THE GUARDIAN; CHRIS BOURNE; IMOGEN LEPERE

Tollesbury Saltings (left), a natural tidal marina and saltmarsh ecosystem at the mouth of the River Blackwater



Centaur in the Blackwater estuary (above). The writer gets to work onboard (above right). Clapboard cottages in West Mersea (left). Skipper Chris Martin, on the left, on Centaur (below)

helping to handle the barge is optional.

Unwisely, given our 3am departure to catch high tide, I sink several pints with the two youngest members of Pudge's crew in the Little Ship Club on the quay. A behemothic man wielding a squeezebox sings sea shanties as salty couples slow dance nearby. "I only know of one or two people my age who are into barging, and I find that disturbing," yells 25-year-old Charlie Francis over strains of Bound for South Australia. "Barging was the lifeblood of the east coast. We should be proud of our heritage and celebrate the communities working to preserve it."

After a few hours in my bunk, I make it on to deck at 4.15am. The moon is a slice of radish in a lilac sky. We're bearing away from the wind and, having set the sails, the crew is already on their second round of tea and custard creams.

As dawn paints its peachy palette, Martin turns the great wheel. He points out Blackwater landmarks that only a local would know: the green buoy known as the Doctor, where early 20th-century fishers left spirits for the alcoholics supposedly drying out at Osea Island's temperance resort; the pub where, as recently as 20 years ago, Martin witnessed a smuggler wordlessly deliver two dripping bags while regulars stared determinedly into their pints; the hulking trawler, Ross Revenge, which is still home to Radio Caroline, the former pirate station – another relic kept alive by volunteers of the Blackwater.

Where the river opens into the silvery sea, the wind picks up and the barge rocks gently against the tide. My eyelids are heavy and the slowness of the whole experience is working its magic on my screen-frazzled brain. Martin calls for the staysail to be unfurled, a 20-minute task that rewards the barge with another knot and a half of speed. "This life is the antithesis of the digital age's obsession with instant gratification," he says. "Sailing barges may not be able to teach us much about cargo any more, but they can teach us the value of slowing down, doing things with our hands and spending time in nature."

As we make our stately, seven-knot progress, 370 sq metres of rust-red canvas billows above and fingers of salt marsh slide by. With so little distraction, the coffee tastes lip-curlingly bitter, the bacon sandwiches as saline as the deep. I settle on a coil of rope to scan the horizon for porpoises, but soon drift into sleep.

A swim from a sandbank near Tollesbury is followed by a meander through West Mersea at golden hour. Clapboard cottages framed by hollyhocks sit beside sailmakers and chandleries converted into trendy cafes. We drop anchor in the Blackwater estuary and beneath a blazing sunset tuck into lasagne on deck. I haven't felt this present for months. It's all such a delight I begin to feel concerned about the trust's future. Sailing barges cost between £30,000 and £100,000 a year to keep afloat. The trip I'm on costs just £220 including meals, while the Trust's annual membership is only £37.50.

Although the trust offers training in many of the skills needed to maintain the barges, sourcing the timber is becoming increasingly difficult – and expensive. "Centaur's exterior planking is pitch pine from the Mississippi basin, which is incredibly durable, but has been virtually exhausted," says Martin. "And so much of the timber trade has been replaced by plastic."

The trust also offers free training for future skippers, including the mate on our trip, 18-year-old Ben Weldon, the son of a local shipwright. However, it typically takes 2,000 hours – or 10 years – and the dropout rate is high.

While the trust has recently been awarded £28,090 from the National Lottery Heritage Fund to develop a bid for the £4m needed to restore Centaur, it seems wrong that responsibility for keeping this thread of Britain's maritime story from unravelling rests on so few shoulders. Sailing may be associated with privilege, but we are a seafaring nation and this inheritance belongs to all of us.

On Sunday morning, our last on board, a westerly fills the sails, and the tea-coloured Blackwater wrinkles beneath the bow as we beat our way back towards Maldon. "Lee ho," Martin calls, showing me how to spin the wheel to help the crew tack. "So far we've used less than a gallon of fuel to do 50 miles. Pretty extraordinary, given that a family car does about 30 miles to the gallon."

When I asked Pearce at the start of the trip why keeping Thames sailing barges afloat is worth the fight, he looked blank, as if such a question had never occurred to him. He showed me a pencil sketch of a barge he had drawn at the age of 15 in Greenwich, left half-finished when his skipper had poked his head through the hatch and invited him below for dinner. Now, more than 70 years later, he bends once more over that drawing as though no time has passed.

Eventually, he half-whispers: "Well, they're just lovely, ain't they?" He glances toward the window. Nearby, Centaur waits on the mud for the returning tide.

The trip was provided by the Thames Sailing Barge Trust (bargetrust.org). The next weekend aboard Centaur departs on 14 August, £220 for two nights' full board; three-night trips depart on 3 September (£350 on Pudge, £320 on Centaur) and 18 September (£290 on Centaur). A variety of one-day sailings are also available from £55 to £125pp

Five writers explore their favourite British rivers, tracing their sources, tickling for trout and going with the flow by paddleboard, canoe and on foot

Take me to the river

Paddleboarding the Esk in North Yorkshire

A salmon leaps from the water to my right; bubbles rise from the seaweed beneath my board

It's early afternoon on an unusually hot and sunny Yorkshire day. I'm standing on my paddleboard on the tidal section of the River Esk, near Whitby's New Bridge, as cars stream across. The 28-mile-long Esk is special, as it is the only major river in Yorkshire that flows directly into the North Sea.

Ahead of me is a bustling marina, the famous abbey and the West and East piers. The town is full to the brim with visitors in search of the best fish and chips, amusement arcades and tales of Dracula and Captain Cook. Later, in the autumn, goths in their finery will parade the cobbled streets.

Here on the river, however, it is tranquil. A salmon leaps from the water to my right, bubbles rise from the seaweed beneath my board, and to my left, the riverbank absorbs abandoned boats into its grassy knolls. On an evening paddle, you might spot the crews from one of the town's three main rowing clubs (Whitby Coastal, Friendship or Fisherlads).

You can launch from the slipway at the far end of the marina back car park near Coates Marine. Arriving by train or bus, it's a few minutes' walk from the station, with public toilets along the way. Launch about one and a half hours before high tide and head right towards the New Bridge and Ruswarp. Be mindful, this section of the river is tidal and water levels do drop.

After taking in the magnificent view, I turn and paddle towards Ruswarp, a couple of miles inland, passing under the Larpool Viaduct, which carries the 22-mile Cinder Track. Branches of willow trees droop elegantly into the water offering welcome shade. Swans glide past and Highland cattle graze nonchalantly in the fields. A couple hike the path that runs alongside the river.

A few miles inland from Whitby, the Esk passes under the Larpool Viaduct

I first paddled on the Esk with my young sons in 2006. Twenty years later, it still remains a peaceful, hidden gem. We hired kayaks from Ruswarp Pleasure Boats (established 1874) just above the weir, which also rents rowing boats and now paddleboards. For a £5 fee, it offers a private jetty to launch your own craft, which is ideal as access to the river is very limited along this stretch. There is free parking on the roadside here, and with the number 95 bus stop (Arriva) nearby, public transport is an option. Paddle up to Perry's Plants garden centre at Briggswath just before Sleights and then turn back.

You'll pass the Waterside restaurant and Whitby Wellbeing's wild sauna along the way, so family and friends can eat, sweat or dip while you float along, letting the river carry your worries away. Afterwards, nip to Botham's in Sleights for some Resolution tea and lovely iced lemon buns. I promise, it'll be a grand paddleboarding day out in Yorkshire.

Jo Moseley

Jo Moseley is the author of Stand-Up Paddleboarding in Great Britain

Wild camping on the Dart in Devon

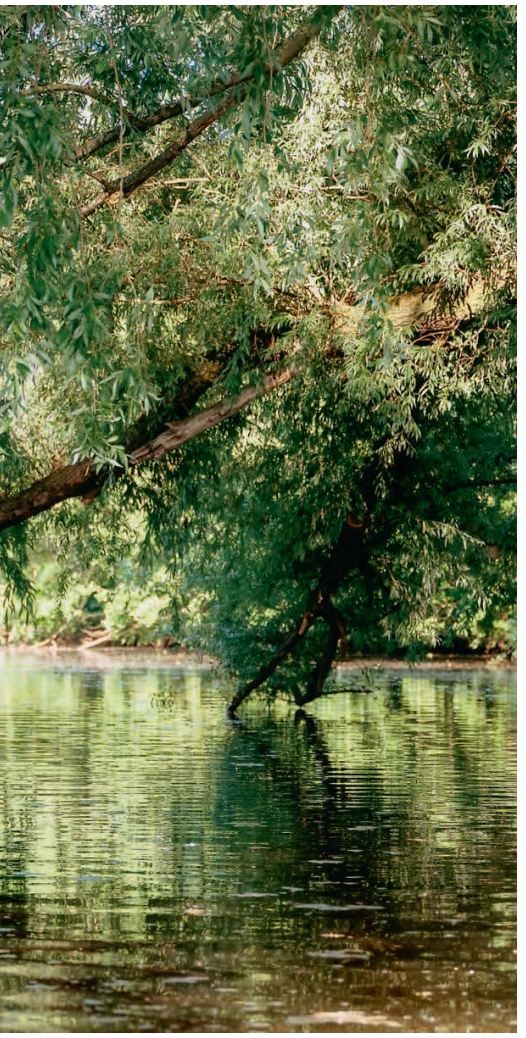
I fall asleep to the steady rush and rumble of the water and wake up early for a swim in one of its deep, crystal-clear pools

On the uplands of Dartmoor, two tributaries - the East Dart and West Dart - join beneath ancient woodland at the well-named hamlet of Dartmeet. They entwine as the River Dart, which flows for 47 miles from open moor into steep wooded valleys and passes peat bogs and tors, oak forest, market towns and rolling pasture before it runs into the sheltered waters of the south Devon coast.

Its upper reaches retain a pristine wildness that feels increasingly rare in southern England. The Dartmoor national park is criss-crossed by some of the cleanest bodies of water in the country, home to salmon, sea trout and otters, while the wooded valleys below are rich remnants of ancient temperate rainforest.

The Dart's name is thought to derive from an old Celtic word meaning "river where oak trees grow", and the lower banks are indeed lined with native oak trees, thick with mosses and ferns. It may be one of Britain's smaller protected landscapes, but Dartmoor feels remarkably untamed. You can cross it on foot in a few days, yet it's surprisingly easy

MARY DAVIES PHOTOGRAPHY; MACIEJ OLSZEWSKI/ALAMY; BEYOND ADVENTURE; MADDIE RED/ALAMY



Jo Moseley paddleboarding on the Esk (left). Sian Lewis wild camping next to the Dart (right), which runs through Dartmoor national park (below)

to lose yourself in the rolling mists, twisting woodlands and miles of open moorland of this ethereal landscape.

It's that sense of freedom that keeps drawing me back. I love nothing more than stuffing a tent into my rucksack and heading out on foot for a riverside camp, following the Dart and its web of streams and creeks until I find a quiet bend or grassy bank for the night. I fall asleep to the steady rush and rumble of the water and wake up early for a swim in one of its deep, crystal-clear pools before packing up and walking on.

I can roam about like this because Dartmoor is the only place in England where wild camping is legally permitted. In the national park, "backpack", or wild camping, is allowed for one or two nights in some areas, provided you stay away from roads and settlements and leave no trace of your visit.

Sometimes, I have company on the riverbanks. I've huddled in bivouac bags with friends and woken totally covered in sparkling droplets of dew. I've camped on the water's edge and woken in the middle of the night to what sounded like an invading army around my tent. It turned out to be a troop of scouts, arriving spectacularly late at their campsite and gamely pitching flimsy-looking tents by the light of their headlamps. And once, at dusk, I think I glimpse the sleek head of an otter slipping into the current. But more often than not, once evening falls and I sit by the door of my tent watching the water darken, I have the Dart all to myself.

Sian Lewis

Fishing on the Dove in the Peak District

This is the spiritual home of fly-fishing and still holds a mythical place in fishers' minds

There's a trout rising upstream from where I am standing on the bank of the River Dove in Beresford Dale, on the border of Staffordshire and Derbyshire. I mark the spot – just beyond that overhanging tree branch – and rue the fact that it will make casting a fly without getting snagged tricky. I need to get into the river and wade over to the other bank for a clear shot. But it's a steep drop to the water and the pools look deep in this stretch; deep enough to go over my chest waders. I walk back downstream to a spot where I can safely enter the fast-flowing river, but realise it's going to be a long wade upstream. Too long and splashy, which will disturb any fish and scatter them. So, I get out again and walk back to where I first spotted the feeding trout. I am caught in indecision, and repeat this pattern several times before giving up on this particular fish.

The meander at this section of the river has formed a little peninsula, and standing in the middle of it is a fishing hut, where I go to drink a coffee and consider my tactics. This isn't any old fishing hut, however. This one is a substantial structure, built from stone, with pillars framing the door and with an inscription in Latin, "Piscatoribus Sacrum" (Sacred to all Fishermen).

In the lintel stone is a

➔

Andy Pietrasik considers his tactics beside the Dove

Readers' travel tips
British and Irish rivers

Winning tip
South Downs to the sea

Following the **River Ouse** (one of five British Ouses) to the sea is great fun, either on foot or bike. I start near Horsham, West Sussex, and track the Ouse Valley Way, which passes through the South Downs. Cross rolling fields and stroll on woodland paths; you can pause at the beautiful Nymans, an extraordinary garden. The river walk goes under a 37-arch Victorian railway viaduct near Balcombe and leads to Lewes in East Sussex. The final part is an easy stretch of flat riverside walking as the coast comes into sight at Newhaven. **Peter**

Waterfalls in County Durham

The **River Tees** crashes over High Force waterfall amid dramatic moorland before bubbling over Low Force downstream. Park at Bowlees and cross the Tees at Low Force on the historic Wynch suspension bridge, built in the 1830s. It's a good place to stop and watch kayakers tackle the waterfall. Continue upstream across moors to roaring High Force. After all that fresh air, finish with cake at Bowlees visitors centre. Bliss! **Hannah S**

Meander through Edinburgh

The **Water of Leith** Walkway is a 13-mile riverside journey from Balerno to Leith via Edinburgh, lovingly cared for by the Water of Leith Conservation Trust. A good introduction is to walk from Roseburn downstream to Stockbridge. It's about two miles and takes roughly 45 minutes through Dean Village and passing St Bernard's Well. **Keith Cumming**

Ireland's 'Mississippi Delta'

Shannon harbour in the Irish Midlands marks the spot where the Grand Canal meets Ireland's **River Shannon**. As children, our biggest treat was when my father's childhood friend would take us in his boat from Shannon harbour to the river proper. The landscape changes utterly. On a warm day it feels like leaving rural Ireland and going down the Mississippi Delta. On a wet day, you can't see the other side of the river. **Eve**

To enter our readers' tips competition and see the terms and conditions, visit theguardian.com/readers-travel-tips (you must be a UK resident to enter). The week's best tip, chosen by Tom Hall of Lonely Planet, wins a £200 voucher to stay at a Coolstays property. This is a selection of tips: see more on our website

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cypher of intertwined letters: CC and IW, for Charles Cotton, the poet who built this "little fishing house" on his estate in 1674, and Izaak Walton, who wrote The Compleat Angler in 1653. Cotton added "Instructions how to angle for a trout or grayling in a clear stream" to accompany the fifth edition of Walton's book, considered to be the first technical manual of fly-fishing and one of the most reprinted books in the English language.

The River Dove is the spiritual home of fly-fishing because of Walton and Cotton, and it still holds a mythical place in fishers' minds. As someone who grew up on the Staffordshire-Derbyshire border, and fished the Dove where it joins the River Trent at Newton Solney in my youth, I was well aware of the river's special status. But, at that age, I wasn't about to give myself the extra homework of reading a 17th-century treatise on fishing and nature. Instead, an English teacher who fished furnished me with the only line I needed to know: "you will find it one of the purest crystalline streams you have seen."

The stretch of the Dove I'm fishing – called the Temple beat after Cotton's fishing house – races and tumbles through a narrow tree-lined dale hemmed in by limestone crags. Near the bridge above a section known as the Pike Pool, a family is splashing and paddling in the early summer sunshine. There's a popular 4-mile loop that starts at Hartington village, and the path is too busy with walkers to fish, so I enter the river at the bridge and wade and fish "the vale it winds through like a snake" until I spot the rising trout and stop for my coffee break.

Later that day, I lose all sense of time in the hypnotic flow of catching and releasing a series of small wild brown trout. Just beyond the fishing house, someone has carved a large hole into the base of a dead oak tree, the perfect place to sit and watch dippers skit along the banks and damselflies dance upon the surface. A little further on, a large Hereford cow is drinking from the river, framed by overhanging trees and with a verdant conical hill in the background. The scene strikes me as being a pastoral masterpiece, much like The Compleat Angler.

Andy Pietrasik

A day ticket on the Temple beat can be booked through Fishing Breaks from £65

Sourcing the Severn and Wye in mid-Wales

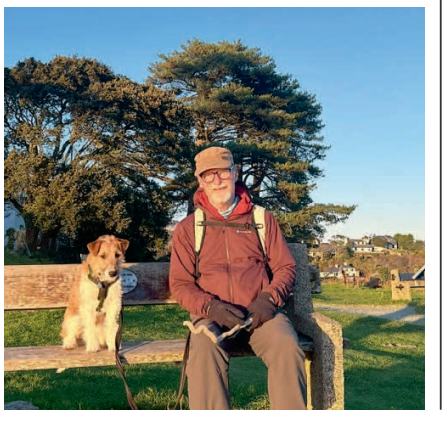
I stumble on pools alive with tiny frogs. There are orchids and a magnificent golden-ringed dragonfly settles next to me

It will prove to be the best of hikes, and in some ways the worst. I start out early from Eisteddfa Gurig on the A44, hoping to get going while the day is cool. My plan is to visit the sources of two of Britain's greatest rivers – the Severn and the Wye which, by a fluke of geography, lie a couple of miles apart on a mountain ridge in mid-Wales.

The path leads me up Pumlumon Fawr, a 752-metre (2,467 ft) massif with magnificent views to the Irish Sea. The day is scorching hot and the bald sheep-nipped hills look only an inch of topsoil away from becoming a desert. Of the two rivers, the Severn gets the finer start in life. There is a marker post next to a deep, dark pool of water that is being squeezed from the bog. In ancient times, humans worshipped springs, but there are no garlands here, only a few sea shells carried upstream by hikers from the Bristol Channel on the 224-mile (360km) Severn Way.

A short walk downstream brings me into a deep valley where the Severn, already gathering force, bounces through ferny glades. It feels as if someone is caring for this river, determined to give it a good start in life. There is a useful car park further down the valley, but I cut away through the forest to find the origin of its twin, the Wye.

I have hopes of a dip in a mountain pool, but there are misgivings. Arguably the loveliest river in



A footbridge over the Severn (left). Kevin Rushby with his dog Stevie (right). The 'little fishing house' on the River Dove (top)

MADDIE RED/ALAMY; KEVIN RUSHY; ANDY PIETRASIK

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Ailsa Sheldon and her teenage son canoe the Tay (above), where she catches sight of a kingfisher (left)

Britain, the Wye has been hitting headlines for a severe decline in water quality. Dead salmon have been found, algal blooms reported. Campaigners, however, have scored a major victory in creating a charter of rights, including the right to flow and be free of pollution. Significant authorities, including Powys and Herefordshire, have adopted it. There is hope.

The first omen is the defunct Nant Iago lead mine, a reminder that human impact on the environment is nothing new. Government statistics show that about 900 miles (1,500km) of our rivers and estuaries are still contaminated by 19th-century mines. I skirt around the old workings and walk up the valley. In the wrinkles of this hillside, the Wye has a moorland birth, a harsh ordeal. No sooner has the clean, bright water started out than it's being crapped in by sheep and messed about by humans. Any thought of a dip in a pool, or even a sip from the source, is brutally quashed.

The moorland/forested contrast with the Severn is not unplanned: scientists have been controlling and assessing these non-identical twins since a time when flood risks and algal blooms were not issues. Whatever their conclusions, however, our expectations of rivers remain pitifully low. In 17th-century Britain, by contrast, salmon were so plentifully available for people to fish for themselves that there was little market for them.

I carry on down the Wye Valley Walk, a 136-mile route whose leaping salmon logo is looking sadly inappropriate. After a few miles, I turn west up a side stream that has a toxic reddish tint. Only a Martian would take a dip. This has become a grim trudge, but finally, up a side valley, I stumble on deep pools alive with tiny frogs. Spruce and pine have been planted. There are orchids and bog asphodels. Then, a magnificent golden-ringed dragonfly settles next to me. My spirits are restored. Maybe the Wye can bounce back. I set off for nearby Llangurig where there's a pub, the Bluebell Inn, and a tearoom.

Kevin Rushby

Canoeing the Tay in Perthshire

As we pull the canoes ashore, there's a flash of iridescent turquoise. My first ever sighting of a kingfisher

The Tay is Scotland's longest river (117 miles) and Britain's mightiest, discharging more water than the longer Thames and Severn combined. Rising on the slopes of Ben Lui in Argyll, gathering strength from Highland burns before widening through Perthshire and eventually reaching the North Sea at Dundee.

It's the middle stretch, from Killin to Dunkeld through Highland Perthshire, that I love best. At Killin, we've happily lost whole afternoons to picking wild raspberries, skimming stones and climbing trees. My boys climbed their first Munro here, Ben Lawers, when their legs were much shorter. They loved it.

Further along the banks at Lawers and Kenmore is where my sisters and I head for restorative escapes: alternating freezing loch swims with a hot tub has become our preferred form of therapy.

I've often walked by the river, but was curious to see it from a different angle: by canoe. Aberfeldy is a two-hour drive north from Edinburgh, so it's an early start for me and my son Louis, 15. We're welcomed at Beyond Adventure with coffee and a briefing, then transferred upriver with two long orange canoes and our instructor, Kevin Meldrum.

Our route begins on the River Lyon before its confluence with the Tay. In this calm eddy, we get a quick lesson in paddling and turning the boat. Louis is 6ft-plus and I am not, which seemed a recipe for paddling in circles. Kevin keeps us right, and Louis soon learns to counteract any erratic paddling on my side. We meet the Tay over a gentle rapid and begin paddling downstream. We settle into the river's rhythm, learning to read the current and steer around camouflaged anglers patiently waiting for salmon, and spotting herons standing guard in the shadows.

The banks of the Tay are changing, thanks to the returning beaver population. We don't spot any (they emerge at dusk), but we do see evidence of stripped bark and felled trees by the river. Paddling into a tree-lined eddy, we admire a carefully constructed beaver lodge.

We pull the canoes ashore on a little island for a picnic lunch, and as we eat our sandwiches, there's a flash of iridescent turquoise. My first ever sighting of a kingfisher.

It's great to be on the water with a guide who knows the river so well. At each stretch of rapids, we're set a route, and navigate each one facing downstream, still smiling. As we return to Aberfeldy, we paddle under General Wade's Bridge, unchanged since it was built in 1733. We've been on the water for three hours, but it feels all too soon when we approach the Beyond Adventure base. Reluctant to leave, we find a deep, peaty pool for a swim.

Heading home, we stop for a pizza (a teenage second lunch) and cold drinks at The Taybank in Dunkeld. Watching the Tay flow past the beer garden, I realise the river looks different to me now. Once you've travelled with it, it's hard not to wonder what's waiting around the next bend.

Ailsa Sheldon

Beyond Adventure offers half-day discovery canoeing tours from £63 adults, £47.25 children, £199.50 for a family (two adults, two children)

ALEX COOPER/ALAMY

Puzzle solutions

(puzzles on page 78)

Answers to quiz
by Thomas Eaton

1 *Samuel Pepys's diary.*
2 *Southend-on-Sea.*
3 *US supreme court.*
4 *Codeine.*
5 *Jack Brabham (1966).*
6 *Guides/Guiding.*
7 *Shah's Iran.*
8 *Aran Islands (in Ireland).*
9 *Recent Pantone colours of the year.*
10 *Approximate number of seconds it takes light from the sun to reach the planets (abbreviated, Mercury to Neptune).*
11 *Rarely seen without their sunglasses.*
12 *Key elements of the so-called Columbian exchange.*
13 *Details of South Asian flags: India; Pakistan; Sri Lanka; Bangladesh.*
14 *Married at Madison Square Garden: onstage in 1974; mass wedding of Unification church; in 2026.*
15 *Title characters of George Bernard Shaw plays.*

Answers to Weekend Crossword
by Sy

The kids' quiz
Molly Oldfield

This quiz answers questions posed by children – will you get a better score than your parents?

ILLUSTRATION: HENNIE HAWORTH

1 Evie, 6, asks: why do sloths hang upside down?
A Sloths love to see things from a fresh perspective
B To get blood to their brains
C To save energy and to reach the tastiest leaves
D They want to copy bats

2 Vincent, 5, asks: what is time?
A Right now, it's 11.44am
B Time is a way we measure out days and weeks and years, past, present, future
C It's a herb used in cooking
D Time is a green fruit

3 Bailey, 4, asks: what is the largest number you can count to?
A 1,000 - most people get bored and stop by then!
B It's too tricky to count above 200,000
C 9,999,999 - the end of all the numbers
D There is no limit, but there is a current world record of 1,070,000

4 Tabitha, 10, asks: why do we have seasons?
A Because the Earth rotates on a tilt
B The sun likes to take a rest sometimes
C In the winter, clouds get thicker and stop the sun's warmth
D Jupiter creates the seasons on Earth

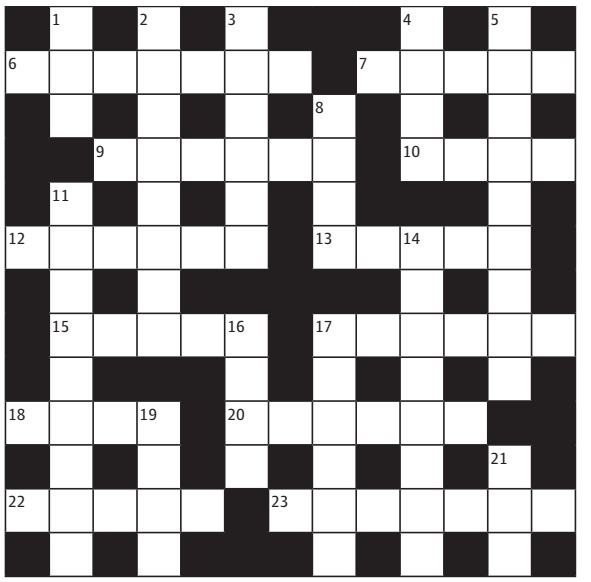
5 Benjamin, 12, asks: what are gamma rays and where do they come from?
A They're a type of heat that comes from mould
B They're soap droplets that come from flowers
C Gamma rays are green and come from algae
D They are powerful waves of energy from the centres of radioactive atoms

Scan the code to send Molly a question for a future quiz

Answers (no peeking!)
1 *C. Sloths hang upside down mainly to conserve energy, and to help them reach the leaves that are easy to digest. Unlike humans, their bodies are adapted to work well upside down for 90% of the day.*
2 *B. Well, it was 11.44 when I was writing this answer, in France! A lot of time has passed since then. There are complex answers from physicists and philosophers but, put simply, time is a way for us to measure how long things take, using clocks and calendars.*
3 *D. Numbers go on infinitely, but in 2025 Favour Ogechi Ani from Nigeria broke a world record by counting aloud to 1,070,000 over 70 consecutive days.*
4 *A. The Earth orbits the sun and rotates, but it's on a tilt of about 23.5 degrees. When the northern hemisphere, including the UK, is angled towards the sun, it's our summer. When it's tilted away from the sun, temperatures are colder.*
5 *D. A gamma ray is the highest-energy type of electromagnetic radiation. It is produced through the decay of an atomic nucleus (centre of an atom), or during solar flares in space.*

Molly Oldfield's new book, Everything Under the Sun: All Around the World, based on her podcast, is out now. Does your child have a question? To submit one, scan the QR code above

Weekend crossword
Sy



Across
6/4 Annual event in Norfolk, home to World Championship Snail Racing (7,4)
7 See 5
9 John ....., author of Rabbit, Run and The Witches of Eastwick (6)
10 Mount ...., volcano in Italy (4)
12 ..... Bay, Cook's landing place in Australia (6)
13 The ..... Witch Project, 1999 horror movie (5)
15 ..... O'Neal, star of Paper Moon (5)
17 ..... Bevis, professional wrestler – and her mother (6)
18 Amanda ...., shepherd and television personality (4)
20/23 Former name of Welsh region, home to the annual Green Man festival (6,7)
22 The Stone of ...., coronation block (5)
23 See 20

Down
1 ... Ball, presenter (3)
2 Another name for aubergine (8)
3 ..... Fair, novel by Thackeray (6)
4 See 6
5/7 Welsh town, home to the annual World Bog Snorkelling Championships (9,5)
8 Sydney and Beatrice ...., co-founders of the LSE (4)
11 West Sussex town, home to an annual revival of events leading to D-day (9)
14/21 Call sign of the US presidential jet? (3,5,3)
16 Stage name of the musician and animal rights activist Richard Hall (4)
17 Scandinavian country, capital Stockholm (6)
19 A message hidden in a crossword puzzle (4)
21 See 14

Solutions to Crossword and Thomas Eaton's quiz *page 77*

Quiz
Thomas Eaton

1 What was written between 1 January 1660 and 31 May 1669?
2 Which UK resort has the world's longest pleasure pier?
3 Sandra Day O'Connor was the first woman appointed to which body?
4 Which painkiller's name is derived from the Greek for "poppy head"?
5 Which driver won the F1 title in a car bearing his own name?
6 The Trefoil Guild is an adult branch of which organisation?
7 Savak was the secret police of which state?
8 Inishmore is the largest island in which archipelago?
What links:
9 Cloud Dancer; Mocha Mousse; Peach Fuzz; Viva Magenta?
10 M (192); V (360); E (500); M (760); J (2,580); S (4,800); U (9,600); N (14,400)?
11 Bono; Billy Gibbons; Karl Lagerfeld; Roy Orbison; Anna Wintour?
12 Potatoes, tomatoes, maize and tobacco v cattle, wheat, bananas and sugar cane?
13 Ashoka chakra; crescent moon and star; lion holding sword; red disc?
14 Sly Stone and Kathy Silva; 4,150 people in 1982; Taylor Swift and Travis Kelce?
15 Cleopatra and Julius Caesar; Joan of Arc; Barbara Undershaft; Kitty Warren?

Stephen Collins

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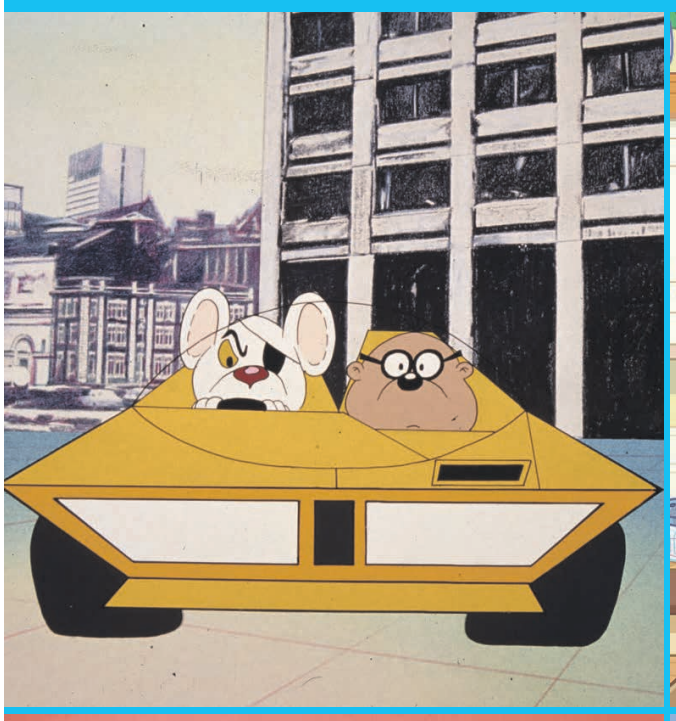
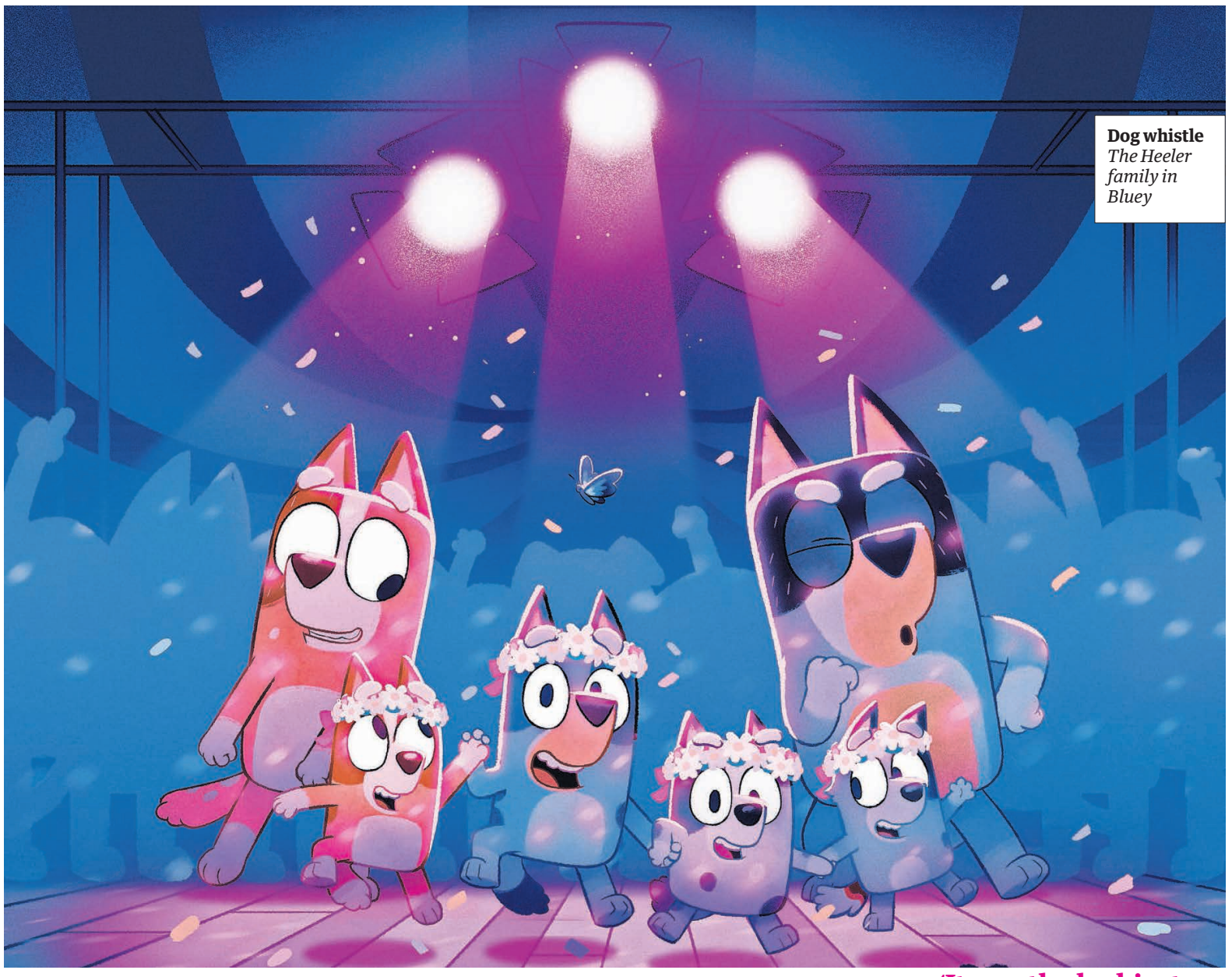
WHAT'S ON

8-14 August 2026

'IT'S LIKE WINNING THE LOTTERY!' THE MAKERS OF KIDS' TV'S MOST ICONIC THEMES

The Guardian





Dog whistle *The Heeler family in Bluey*

Unsung heroes

Big cheques, standing ovations, irate adults – there are surprising sides to composing a children's TV theme tune. **Michael Hogan** talks to the creators of some of the best to find out the secrets behind the hits

How do you write TV theme music for children? Does it make you mega-rich? And does the tune itself eventually drive you (and parents everywhere) nuts?

We tracked down the creators of half-a-dozen of TV's greatest children's show themes in order to find out. As Bluey's Joff Bush told us: "The key lesson is that if you're going to write a theme tune, make sure you really like it because you're going to hear it a helluva lot!"

From nostalgic cult classics to current hits, from cartoon animals to live-action school soaps, six composers confess the secrets of kids' TV music ...

'Parents get woken up at 6am by it'

Composer Julian Nott scores Peppa Pig, as well as Wallace & Gromit, Bing and Ben & Holly's Little Kingdom.

It all started at the National Film and Television School's animation department. Two fellow students became friends: Nick Park, who did Wallace & Gromit, and Mark Baker, who did Peppa Pig. They've been collaborators ever since.

Peppa was just another job that came along. I worked on the pilot episode for free as a favour. It wasn't just the same theme tune as today, it was the same recording. We finally updated it last year but for two decades they used the demo version. It's only 10 seconds long which is shorter than most title sequences. It was a challenge to write a short, sharp, catchy tune.

Peppa took over the world, so I hear my music all the time. I'm often in a cafe or airport and a child will be playing it on their iPad. I'm tempted to lean over and say: 'I wrote that!' but never have. There was a time when I couldn't get on a train without hearing it. It's a strange feeling. Kids watch their favourite shows on repeat, so it can drive parents mad. Toddlers work out how to switch on Peppa Pig and their parents get woken up at 6am by the theme music. It might be one of the most unpopular tunes ever written! But I'm very lucky that it's given me financial security. Peppa Pig was like winning the lottery.

'It was the luckiest two minutes of my life'

Scott Gale wrote the theme song for NBC's 1990s teen sitcom Saved By the Bell.

I was music coordinator on The Golden Girls. One Friday, the producer of this new teen comedy called and asked me to try out for the theme tune. My wife had left me that morning but I put down the phone, picked up my guitar and, bingo, it just poured out of me. It was the luckiest two minutes of my life.

Little did I know that executive producer Peter Engel had told all the other prospective composers not to include "saved by the bell" in the lyrics because he wasn't sure the name would stick. But I never got that message, so the title appeared five times in mine. Peter later admitted he was glad I didn't get his instructions.

Saved By the Bell was the first live-action Saturday morning kids' show. Everything else was cartoons. I thought it'd be lucky to last seven episodes but it ran for four seasons. And the show, thank goodness, was heavy on music. We wrote it all. If there was a jukebox playing, we'd write the songs. The characters formed a rock group. We wrote what they played. There was something new every week.

Saved By the Bell was very good to me. I still get royalties from Spain, South Africa, everywhere. I never tire of hearing it. I'll chance across it while channel surfing and it whisks me back to those wild times. Nearly four decades later, I still get to talk about it. It's nothing but wonderful.

'I ended up writing songs with Ant and Dec'

Martin Brammer is the frontman of pop trio the Kane Gang, whose track became the basis of the theme tune to Byker Grove.

We'd already reworked our song Small Town Creed to be the jingle for Radio 1 DJ Gary Davies's show. The makers of this local teen drama – a sort of Geordie version of Grange Hill – asked if the Kane Gang fancied doing the theme tune. Either out of expedience or laziness, we thought: "Hang on! Maybe we can get a third version out of it."

A dozen of the cast came down to do the "Ooh, Byker Grove!" chants. That little laugh at the end was from Lyndyann Barrass, who played Spuggie. We liked it and left it in. People tend to remember that laugh. A few years ago, I got a request from another artist – Professor Green or someone – to sample it.

The show ran for 18 series, so royalties make a handy annual bonus. It's not a life-changing amount of money but it's hard making a living in music nowadays, so sidelines that tick over are invaluable. Byker Grove led to all sorts of connections. I did some work with Donna Air's pop duo Crush and songwriting sessions with Ant and Dec as they were moving away from being PJ & Duncan. Lovely lads.

I've written hundreds of proper songs but the Byker Grove tune always gets a reaction. I write with Olly Murs now and he flipped when he found out. Now there's a reboot in development. It would be madness to change the theme tune, right? Fingers crossed we get the call from Ant and Dec.

'Kids are disappointed that I'm not a six-year-old girl'

Joff Bush wrote the theme music and composes most of the soundtrack for globally loved animation Bluey.

When I was asked to work on Bluey, I was like: "I doubt I'm the right fit but I'll check it out." I'll be forever grateful that I did. I watched the rough pilot episodes and just fell in love. I had do it.

I knew exactly what the show's sound should be. It's hard to describe but I could hear the chord progression in my head. When the writing's that good, it's relatively easy to score. Joe Brumm [Bluey's creator] makes my music look better. I suggested building a library of music which we could reuse but Joe wanted something new for every episode. I was like: "That's a lot of work!" But it became one of the beauties of Bluey.

REX; DISNEY; TRINITY MIRROR/MIRRORPIX/ALAMY; PHOTO 12/ALAMY; EVERETT COLLECTION; SPHERE ABACUS

If I tell a kid that I write the music for the show, they'll ask: "Are you Bluey?" "No." "Oh, OK." They're disappointed that I'm a 41-year-old man, not a six-year-old girl. That keeps your ego in check.

I recently became a father and suddenly understood why dads find Bluey so emotional. I messaged Joe saying: "I get it now!" My daughter's two and last week, she came back from daycare going: "Doo doo doo doo, Bluey and Bingo!" I was like: "Do you like that song?" She said: "It's pretty good." Then again, I was singing Wagon Ride to her to help her go to sleep. She woke up, put her hand over my mouth and went: "Different music." She's my harshest critic.

'My fee definitely wasn't Scrooge McDuck money'

Pop and musical theatre songwriter Mark Mueller composed the theme tune for late 80s Disney series DuckTales.

I'd just had my first top 10 single, having written Nothin' at All by Heart. That's how I got the meeting at Disney for DuckTales. The execs told me: "Write a radio song, not a cartoon song," with lots of action in the lyrics they could animate to. That's why I came up with "race cars, lasers, aeroplanes … it's a duck blur". I jammed as many moving images as possible into 60 seconds.

After the meeting, I drove back to my tiny apartment and wrote the song in 45 minutes on a second-hand Roland synthesiser. I was in a groove and it spilled out of me.

There are so many hooks in DuckTales. Everything from the intro bass lick to the "d-d-dangers" were meant to worm into your brain. The "woo-hoos" fitted perfectly into three empty beats. Vanity Fair called it "history's catchiest single minute of music". To me, catchy isn't a dirty word. It's what I strive for. My initial fee was $1,250, which definitely wasn't Scrooge McDuck money. It barely paid for a month's rent but thankfully, the royalties were good and they keep coming in.

After the show aired, I received a letter from the mother of an autistic child. She told me that she and her husband had never been able to communicate with their young son until he heard the DuckTales song. They would sing it to each other and it was the first time they truly connected. That touched me.

Its global reach is heady stuff. I went to South Korea and my rather somber tour guide had it as his ringtone. A few months ago in Portugal, a strait-laced female banker launched into it. I heard it from tinny speakers on a rickshaw in London. The impact that this minute-long song had on my life is immeasurable. The experience has been a perfect whirlwind – or should I say "duck blur"?

'I got a £14,000 cheque for ringtones from Japan'

Writer, comedian and musician Mike Harding composed the scores for Danger Mouse and its spin-off Count Duckula.

"Manchester studio Cosgrove Hall Films were fans of my standup, so they asked if I had any ideas for animations. We made a pilot about a busking frog called Far-Out Fred and I did the music for The Reluctant Dragon. Then they said they'd got this mouse super-agent but it wasn't quite working.

I went away and wrote some scripts. I based arch enemy Baron Greenback on this real-life nemesis of mine called Alan Greenbank and made him an evil toad. When it came to the theme music, I studied 60s spy films and wrote a pastiche. Sort of Bond meets Dick Tracy. We dragged in local session musicians and put it together.

Danger Mouse became a classic. David Jason and Terry Scott were terrific at the voices. The animators were amazing. People felt real warmth towards it. I once stood in for Seamus Heaney at short notice, giving a speech at an Irish school arts festival. When I said I wrote the music for Danger Mouse, the kids went wild. I got what my grandad used to call a "standing ovulation".

We still get royalty cheques. The biggest was one year when we got £14,000 from Japan for ringtones. There was a CBBC remake a decade ago which went worldwide but the royalties from Kuala Lumpur are tuppence. I only get a standing ovulation from old people nowadays. But I still have a T-shirt saying "The bloke who wrote the music for Danger Mouse"!

Ring of success *The cast of Saved By the Bell*

Martin & Roman's Irish Road Trip

It's hard to warm to two English people presenting a show about Ireland's culture

Frances Ryan

If you're someone who believes the celebrity travelogue genre has been pushed too far, Martin & Roman's Irish Road Trip (Monday, 8pm, Channel 4) is here to push you to the edge. Then continue pushing until you're falling off a cliff into the Irish Sea.

It is unclear why exactly the producers chose Martin Kemp and his son, Roman, to take viewers on a tour of Ireland. Which to be fair, the two men address in the first three minutes. Martin lived in the country briefly in the 80s during his Spandau Ballet era, we're told. His mum "always said" she was half Irish but – as Roman points out – the family did an ancestral DNA test and they're actually Germanic.

Still, they're keen for a rare chance to spend time together away without the rest of the family. "We've never done it before!" Martin says with excitement. "For good reason," Roman replies.

The series is essentially the television equivalent of English people applying for an Irish passport post-Brexit to avoid the large queues at the airport. Did your great-grandmother twice removed once sleep with a man named Seamus? Who cares, I just want to go on my holidays!

Accept that premise and you're in for a perfectly reasonable time. Part father-and-son buddy movie, part exploration of Irish folklore and landscapes, Irish Road Trip is a love letter to both people and place, albeit one that doesn't quite know what tone to land on.

There's humour, most successfully when Roman – clearly thoughtful and witty – finds opportunities to poke fun at his dad. When they explore keening – the traditional Irish vocal lament for the dead – and Martin does a double take on the word, Roman quips he should know all about "cleaners" as he has about 12 back home to look after his mansion. The jaunty Irish folk music that pops up every 10 minutes reassures the viewer we're all here to have a lovely time.

And yet a fair portion of the content is melancholic. At one point, Roman touchingly admits he's thinking about his own mortality – and the future death of his parents – more as he gets older, to the extent it sometimes keeps him awake at night.

Other sections are outright distressing, especially the tour around Spike Island in Cork Harbour – known as "Ireland's Alcatraz" for its on/off use as a prison for 1,300 years. A tour guide shows the Kemps the seventh-century version of solitary confinement: an isolation room used for punishment where prisoners, including children, were chained to the wall by their neck for weeks. It doesn't help when the tour guide declares that she sometimes sees a ghost. On the ferry ride back, Roman tells Martin that's the first time he's ever been somewhere without hope.

Roman quips that Martin should know all about cleaners – as he has about 12 back home to look after his mansion

But don't worry, the upbeat fiddle has started playing! No wait, Roman is talking about death again. Does his dad believe that you can see your family from above when you die? He hopes not because he'd just be seeing Roman taking the keys to his car.

On paper, I'm the target audience for the series. I'm English-Irish: my grandfather was a jockey in the Grand National; I inherited a Waterford crystal whiskey glass from my Nan; I've never set foot farther west than Birmingham. But two Englishmen learning about Irish folklore is a hard thing to sell, even when they are so earnestly engaged with the locals and experts they meet along the way.

The best moments come when the father-and-son relationship is at the forefront. The tour around the ancient tomb in the second episode is visually striking but my favourite part comes before they even enter. When they're told that a local has a key to get in the tomb (yes, really), Roman encourages his dad to go to her house to ask for it. "He doesn't like meeting new people," Roman says to the camera as he proudly watches Martin knock at the front door.

That, I suppose, is why celebrity travelogues keep getting commissioned: they are a chance for viewers to get up close and personal with both another country and family.

What's next for the Kemps? A German road trip? I've heard they've got suitable DNA.

Pick of the week

Spy Next Door: The Anna Chapman Story

Wednesday, 9pm, Channel 4

The tale of Anna Chapman (AKA Anya Kushchenko) is uncannily emblematic of recent relations between Russia and the west. Chapman was a shrewd spy who charmed her way into the higher echelons of society in London and New York. This fascinating two-part documentary explores her rise and fall, hearing from some of her entirely unwitting companions (who ranged from a Brighton techno DJ to a Mayfair financier) and agents who were involved in surveilling her. As Vladimir Putin briefly played at diplomacy with prime ministers and presidents, Chapman was among his footsoldiers. But, inevitably, in her case and that of Putin, nothing was ever quite as it seemed. *Phil Harrison*

Saturday

Pick of the day

Paul Heaton: Live at Bramall Lane

10.10pm, BBC Two

The Sheffield United fan and maker of some of pop's most fun melodies performed at Bramall Lane last year – and it was 90 minutes packed with joy. In this recording, he is joined by Rianne Downey as they perform all the Housemartins, Beautiful South and solo hits to a lively crowd. The opening half-hour alone boasts Bell Bottomed Tear, Old Red Eyes Is Back, Song for Whoever and I'll Sail This Ship Alone. *Hollie Richardson*

Sandi Toksvig's Hidden Wonders

7pm, Channel 4

Before launching her TV career, Sandi Toksvig earned a degree in archaeology. This fascinating series sees her returning to her academic roots, joining a dig in Dorset. There's an iron age cemetery to be unearthed and, somewhat troublingly, some secrets about human sacrifice to be revealed. *PH*

Bettany Hughes' Lost Worlds: Dawn of Civilisations

8pm, Channel 4

For her latest historical adventure Hughes heads to Turkey to explore the legacy of ancient Anatolia, a region that "left its mark on every era of human history". Highlights include the otherworldly Cappadocia and the spectacular architecture of a 13th-century mosque. *Graeme Virtue*

Paul Heaton: Live at Bramall Lane, Sat

Bettany Hughes' Lost Worlds: Dawn of Civilisations, Sat

Elvis, the Colonel and the Mob

10pm, Channel 4

Blame it on Colonel Tom Parker but Elvis Presley's links to organised crime were, according to this two-part documentary, surprisingly strong. Parker was a denizen of Las Vegas and, along with taking care of Elvis's business, he forged a few shady connections. Eventually, as this film shows, this court became a mixed blessing for the King. *PH*

The Staircase

10.20pm, ITV1

Colin Firth continues to excel in the drama about murder suspect Michael Peterson, despite the production being less essential than the original documentary. In 2003, the Petersons' son Clayton makes an important discovery; in 2017, Michael's new partner Sophie considers how meeting him changed her life. *Jack Seale*

Ghosts Australia

10.50pm, BBC Three

The genius of the Ghosts premise is its adaptability to any cultural context. This Australian version is a case in point, this week touching on issues around colonisation but with the lightest and wittiest of touches. In the present, Kate and Sean handle an invasion of their own as the odious neighbours turn up. *PH*

Warren's Vortex, Mon

Sunday

Pick of the day

Force of Nature

6pm, ITV1

This natural history series has an appropriately polemical edge – its exploration of various natural habitats is filtered through the increasing difficulties faced by animals hoping to thrive in them. It focuses on coastal regions in this episode, as unexpected extreme weather destroys flamingo colonies and ruins the anemone home of clownfish. It's impressive but sobering, too, as an insight into the chaos wrought by humans. *PH*

Van Der Valk

8pm, ITV1

So far, series four of the Amsterdam cop reboot has featured two gangland murders and a car bombing (even if the biggest crime remains the wishy-washy version of the classic theme tune). Marc Warren's prickly Piet is determined to collar the culprit, though it will mean teaming up with a formidable criminal matriarch. *GV*

Richard E Grant's Very Modern Odyssey

8pm, Channel 4

The budget doesn't compare to that enjoyed by Christopher Nolan but if you haven't heard enough hot takes on Homer's epic this summer, Richard E Grant's road trip is one of the better ones. This time, he's in Sicily where he explores the myth of Cyclops and performs, with endearingly luvvy-ish gusto, in an amphitheatre. *PH*

NYO at the Proms

8pm, BBC Four

Conducted by Thomas Adès, the 150-strong National Youth Orchestra will play a trilogy of pieces centring on the underworld: Liszt's Mephisto Waltz No 1, based on Nikolaus Lenau's Faust poem; Berlioz's Symphonie Fantastique; and Part II of Adès's own ballet score Dante: Purgatorio. Petroc Trelawny is your host. *Priya Elan*

The Rapture

9pm, BBC One

This chaotic but enjoyably eccentric drama concludes. Bethany is on the run and her drawings of her visions are becoming more apocalyptic still. With her professionalism being called into question, is Gabs going to risk everything to help her? The walls are closing in around both of them, so she might not have much choice. *PH*

The Piano

9pm, Channel 4

Claudia Winkleman and Mika arrive at Manchester Piccadilly, where their guest expert is German pianist Alice Sara Ott. Excelling on the concourse are a young composer whose piece is based on just two notes, a seven-year-old who has charm to match startling ability, and a musician who has spent time away from their most beloved instrument, but now makes a triumphant, tear-inducing comeback. *JS*

Monday

Pick of the day

Warren's Vortex

10.10pm, Sky Comedy

A zany sci-fi comedy that is a bit like Doctor Who: the sitcom. Warren has a mysterious glittering portal in his shed, but he only ever uses it to dump leaves in. When his teenage daughter is sucked into it one day – leaving her trusty vape behind – he jumps in after her. They find themselves in 2043 where evil refrigerators are trying to kill them (yes, refrigerators). From there, they end up in lots of trouble across different dimensions. *HR*

Martin & Roman's Irish Road Trip

8pm, Channel 4

Martin Kemp used to live in Dublin; his son Roman films a quizshow in Belfast but has never explored outside of the city. That's reason enough, then, for a father-and-son road trip around Ireland. Expect bickering and bonding, as they start in County Cork to learn about Clíodhna, Queen of the Banshees, and Ireland's former version of Alcatraz, Spike Island. *HR*

Evolution

9pm, BBC Two

This has been a revelatory series – with his evident love for the subject serving as our route in, Chris Packham has brought evolution to life in dramatic style. He finishes with horses and the question of how they came to be so fast. The answer is both complex and deceptively simple, involving fossils, leeches and fish. *PH*

Long Lost Family: Born Without Trace

9pm, ITV1

More heartbreaking tales of lost children and bittersweet reunions. This week Davina McCall, Nicky Campbell and the genealogy team help Michael, who was abandoned as a premature newborn in a box outside a hospital, and Christine, who was left on the last carriage of a train at Waterloo. *PE*

Celebrity Hunted

9pm, Channel 4

Some of this season's celebrities are such a delight you'd happily hide them in your cupboard, but the

ANDREY RUDAKOV/BLOOMBERG VIA GETTY IMAGES; BBC/JUNGLE ENTERTAINMENT PTY/STAN ENTERTAINMENT/SCREEN AUSTRALIA/LISA TOMASETTI; BBC/NORTHERN PICTURES

Savage Mountain, Tue

brains and brawn of Chief Ray and the team aren't seduced by fame. As the stars hatch a daring escape plot in Brighton, a couple of cheeky chancers think they can outsmart the Hunters. *Hannah Verdier*

Secret Lives of Gypsy Wives
10pm, Channel 4
More of the irresistible reality show following gen Z Traveller influencer Trewley Precious and her overprotective but loving Essex brood. With brother Jamie's 40th approaching, Trewley plans a trip for the family. Or as she puts it: "Get your titties out in Morocco! Actually don't do that - you'll get nicked ..." *Hannah J Davies*

Tuesday

Pick of the day
Savage Mountain
9pm, Sky Documentaries
A white-knuckle documentary that uses footage captured by Norwegian mountaineer Kristin Harila and her climbing partner Tenjen Lama Sherpa, as they broke a world record by completing 14 of the world's highest peaks in 92 days. But the videos Harila shared turned controversial, as many claimed her team left a porter, Mohammad Hassan, to die en route. This film sets the record straight. *HR*

The Great British Sewing Bee
8pm, BBC Two
Sophie Willan is primed with the puns as sports week kicks off and the contestants dive in to make a pair of men's swimming shorts. A team challenge brings some stunning creations, but an applique motif unravels when it begs the question: "Is that a badger or a panda?" *HV*

Cold Case Forensics: In the Blood
9pm, ITV1
The final episode of this series examines a case with which most of us will be sadly familiar: the murder of 10-year-old Londoner Damilola Taylor in 2000. Forensic scientist Angela Gallop explains how blood analysis helped the police solve a crime that shocked the nation. *PH*

RuPaul's Drag Race UK: Meet the Queens
9pm, BBC Three
Before Mama Ru, Michelle Visage and their fabulous judges begin to cross-examine the queens, it's time for season eight's hopefuls to make their high-heeled entrance. As last season's queens so beautifully explained, the world needs drag more than ever right now so the dozen divas must deliver. *HV*

Joe and David's Magical Sitcom Tour
9pm, U&Gold
Another journey into sitcom for Wilkinson and Earl. It's David's treat as Joe gives him a Fawlty Towers-themed day. Highlights include a funny conversation with Rosemary - the real-life Polly, who did work experience at the hotel upon which the show was based, and an audience with John Cleese, whose contributions, mercifully, focus exclusively on his illustrious past. *PH*

The Vampire Lestat: Interview With the Vampire
11.05pm, BBC Two
The camp vampire musical chaos takes a sombre moment as Lestat (an electrifying Sam Reid) finally sits down with Daniel (Eric Bogosian) to tell him about his first love - and the traumatic night he turned into a vampire. Meanwhile, Louis (Jacob Anderson) gets some belated, bloody revenge. *HR*

Wednesday

Pick of the day
Murder Trial
9pm, BBC Two
Featuring footage from the trial, door bell camera film and face-to-face interviews, this is a closeup look at the murder of Brian Low, a groundsman who was shot while walking his dog in rural Scotland. The accused is David Campbell, a gamekeeper who was, according to the prosecuting lawyer, good at concealing the evidence. *PE*

Athens: Birth of Democracy
9.35am, PBS America
Modern populations sometimes take democracy for granted. But the concept's inception was troubled and this documentary visits Athens to investigate its origin story. The exploration is very literal - it focuses on an archaeological quest to unearth everything from the bodies of dissidents to ancient voting machines. *PH*

Extraordinary Extensions
8pm, Channel 4
Musician Tinie Tempah continues to channel his inner Kevin McCloud in the third series of this show about ambitious renovation projects. This week, he meets a couple planning a "Korwegian" conversion (that's Korean and Norwegian), and a solo renovator who is starting to feel as though her project is cursed. *HJD*

It'll Be Alright on the Night
9.50pm, ITV1
A rude-looking object derailing an Alan Carr quizshow is among the bloopers, fluffs, boo-boos and cockups celebrated by Tom Allen in another compendium of hilarity scooped up from the cutting-room floor. Also having to compose themselves and do another take are the likes of Joel Dommett, Romesh Ranganathan and Amol Rajan. *JS*

Guy Montgomery's Guy Mont-Spelling Bee
10pm, BBC Three
A double helping of the daft spelling quiz from Australia. Eye-popping retro production design and Montgomery's heroically smarmy hosting make for a heightened, campy experience. The comedic contestants - including standup Rose Matafeo - rise to the challenge. *GV*

Thursday

Pick of the day
The Schoolgirl Terrorist?
10pm, Channel 4
What makes a teenage girl threaten to bomb a synagogue? Rhianan Rudd was the youngest girl to be charged with terror offences in the UK. She took her own life two years later. This sensitive documentary hears from her family to learn more about her vulnerable background, mental health issues and how she was groomed by a neo-Nazi online in lockdown - she even used a bobby pin to scratch a swastika on her head. Was her case treated correctly? *HR*

The Big Deal With Steph McGovern
8pm, BBC Two
This new reality series set in the art world has an unmistakable whiff of an Alan Partridge Dictaphone idea, fused with Flog It-esque daytime DNA and a dash of The Apprentice-style wheeler-dealing. First up, our amateur art dealers must sell graduates' works. *HJD*

He Had It Coming, Fri

Better Date Than Never, Thu

A House Through Time
9pm, BBC Two
David Olusoga's social history series has reached a sixth season for very good reason: the single residence format remains a brilliant way of illuminating wider history via relatable personal histories. This time, he's in Edinburgh, exploring a beautiful townhouse that has sheltered everyone from sculptors to spies. *PH*

The Coen Brothers Story
9pm, BBC Four
In 1999, documentarian Sarah Aspinall interviewed Joel and Ethan Coen. Now, she looks back at the experience and how they have since conquered Hollywood, speaking to their star collaborators, including Tilda Swinton, Jeff Bridges and George Clooney ("They really enjoy just making me the dumb shit in all their movies ... and I love it"). *HR*

Better Date Than Never
9pm, BBC Three
The return of a heartwarming show following new daters and, first up, 68-year-old farmer Dianne is back for a second stab at love. Elsewhere, 28-year-old Kento is looking for a fellow fan of anime, cats and anything to do with Japan - so sushi is the ideal dinner date with Maddie. Fingers crossed! *HR*

Possession
9pm, Sky Atlantic
As it reaches the halfway point, this supernatural thriller exploring Jamaica's colonial past is building up an unsettling head of steam. After a weird encounter at the Hope Hill plantation, Gugu Mbatha-Raw's conflicted lawyer Claudia is beginning to suspect her posh client Oliver (Jonny Lee Miller) may not be quite himself. *GV*

Friday

Pick of the day
He Had It Coming
11.15pm, BBC Three
Lydia West stars in this offbeat Aussie comedy drama about a murder on a university campus. It follows grungy feminist art student Elise (West) and her unlikely new influencer mate Barbara (Natasha Liu Bordizzo), who get drunk and deface a statue - only to wake up and find that the institution's star athlete was killed there overnight. Can they cover their tracks? *HR*

Beethoven's Seventh at the Proms
7pm, BBC Four
The Los Angeles Philharmonic returns to the Proms, conducted by surprise World Cup final half-time show participant Gustavo Dudamel. It's an evening of vibrant rhythm and vital energy, as Beethoven's ecstatic seventh symphony is paired with Mexican composer Gabriela Ortiz's Revolución Diamantina. *JS*

Bergerac
9pm, BBC Two
This reboot emphasises the darker aspects of detective Jim Bergerac's character. As the endgame approaches, Bergerac seems to have the measure of Pippa Heyward's Margaret. But there's a danger that his emotional investment in catching Cate's killer might blow him off course. *PH*

Frank Skinner: 30 Years of Dirt
9pm, Sky One
A welcome return to the warm bosom of the standup special for the one-time national treasure. Skinner riffs on pensioner-age concerns including the appearance of his long-term partner ("She doesn't even have laughter lines!"), Harold Shipman and landlines. *PE*

Grimsburg
10pm, Sky One
More adult animated fun from hapless detective Marvin Flute (voiced by Jon Hamm) whose titular town has become ever more comically crime-ridden. This time, a homage to a particular genre of American teen fiction as Flute visits a summer camp where a slasher is leaving a trail of bloody destruction. *PH*

Ann Droid
10.40pm, BBC One
Robots go camping - what could possibly go wrong? Diane Morgan's comedy drama about a widow and her carer robot just gets funnier and more poignant as Sue (Sue Johnston) and Linda (Morgan) stay at a campsite. But as the series heads to its end, so too does the question of Linda's future. *HR*

Pick of the week

My Brilliant Career

Netflix, from Thursday

Miles Franklin's 1901 coming-of-age novel about free-spirited country girl Sybylla Melvyn is regarded as a proto-feminist classic. It's punchily brought to life in an adaptation that feels like a dusty but dynamic Australian second cousin to Bridgerton. Philippa Northeast stars as Sybylla: pushed reluctantly towards high society by her dirt-poor family but desperate to become a writer and fiercely resistant to, as she sees it, being "slowly turned on the spit of propriety". However, there's plenty about her family's financial and social circumstances that she doesn't fully understand. Northeast is an effervescent lead while Christopher Chung brings quiet charisma to Sybylla's love interest, Harry. *Phil Harrison*

Mourinho

Netflix, from Tuesday

One of the more interesting and divisive characters of the Premier League era gets the deep-dive documentary treatment in this three-part series which, helpfully for Netflix, coincides with José Mourinho's arrival at Real Madrid. It's clearly made with Mourinho's full cooperation (as a tour of his home, with a focus on his well-stocked trophy cabinet, suggests) but that doesn't mean it glosses over the various controversies that have marked his career, most of which seem to stem from his almost pathological sense of ambition. As he wryly points out: "You wouldn't do a documentary with a guy who won nothing." *PH*

The Chosen in the Wild With Bear Grylls

Prime Video, from Sunday

Performative Christian wholesomeness squared in this series in which Bear Grylls takes the cast of religious drama The Chosen for gruelling but rewarding outdoor rambles around American natural wonders including the Adirondack Forest and the Great Basin Desert. As is customarily the way with such things, the combination of fresh air, nerve-racking challenges and extreme earnestness around campfires brings many issues to the surface – and, one by one, the actors (who include Jonathan Roumie, Paras Patel and Elizabeth Tabish) start to open up. *PH*

Reacher

Prime Video, from Wednesday

TV's foremost combiner of deadpan quips and deadly violence returns for another magnificently concussive adventure. When Jack Reacher (played with relish by the mountainous Alan Ritchson) encounters a crying woman on the subway, he gets more than he bargained for. He has stumbled into a massive conspiracy and his attempts to set the record straight only entangle him further. Still, even if it pits him against the rich and powerful, Reacher isn't a man to take no for an answer. Very close to self-parody and absolutely none the worse for it. *PH*

Women in Blue

Apple TV, from Wednesday

This drama about an all-female division within the Mexican police is (very loosely) inspired by real 1970s events. But as the show returns, it seems more comfortable simply regarding itself as a fiction. There is a slightly cartoonish quality to these shrewd, principled, immaculately turned-out female cops as they battle both crime and conservative impulses within the force. There's another serial killer on the loose – but the women don't trust their own police department to follow the evidence wherever it might lead. Cue fun crime-fighting exploits with added subterfuge. *PH*

An Amputation Obsession: The Monster and the Surgeon

Prime Video, from Thursday

The story of Neil Hopper will surely be attracting the attention of documentary-makers for years to come. However, Prime is quick out of the traps with this true-crime special about a man who was jailed for insurance fraud in 2025 in the wake of a journey into body modification that culminated in him voluntarily losing both legs. The criminal case is explored but, more interestingly, the documentary also looks at extreme body integrity dysmorphia and the underground networks devoted to it. *PH*

Everybody Lies

Channel 4, from Friday

This engrossing French drama series seems very fitting for 2026, as it centres on Vincent Verner, a former cop who has been fired from the force for getting a little too close to bringing down a rich, deeply corrupt and dangerously well-connected man. However, his outsider status has made him useful in a semi-official capacity – he's now part of a new unit charged with investigating cases and organisations whose power and influence make them too big to fail. Can this righteous maverick succeed where conventional law enforcement has failed? *PH*

NETFLIX

Audio

Catchup TV

Ryan Murphy returns to form and Ted Lasso has a new role

The Shards
Disney+
★★★★★

After last year's All's Fair, a legal drama so bad I gave it a zero-star review, Ryan Murphy is finding his glorious groove again. The Shards is Murphy's adaptation of Bret Easton Ellis's 80s-set metafictional/autobiographical novel of the same name; theirs is a marriage made in pop-culture heaven. We open in the 1980s with a laconic voiceover from our main man, Bret (Igby Rigney). He is sketching out the immediate future for him and his select, gilded group of high-school friends. "A season of horror and murder that would destroy us all …" Think Gatsby with quaaludes, settle back and enjoy. Murphy has stuffed the cast with the offspring of 80s icons – most notably Kaia Gerber (daughter of Cindy Crawford), and the show is beautifully curated, shot and scored. It is a true return to form for Murphy. *Lucy Mangan*

Possession
Sky Atlantic/Now
★★★☆☆

What do you do when a client worth £50m, thanks to family ownership of a Jamaican sugar plantation, dies and is revealed to have cut his only child out of his will and left the lot to an unknown "African national" called Cudjoe East? Why, you call in your firm's biracial lawyer, Claudia (Gugu Mbatha-Raw) to head over to Kingston, find him and discredit him asap. But the house is one that has been appearing to her in recent nightmares. What follows is a dual-timeline mystery – one story unfolds in the present, another 300 years ago when the estate was staffed by slaves – with a supernatural inflection that allows the two to mesh. Possession is a well-textured, evocative tale touching on many important questions, if never quite digging far enough into any of them to be truly satisfying. *LM*

The Salisbury Poisonings: A Spy Next Door
Sky Documentaries/Now
★★★★☆

This documentary about the 2018 poisoning of Russian military officer turned British double agent Sergei Skripal, along with his daughter Yulia, is a compendium of ways in which the Salisbury attack was fascinating and deeply strange. We meet a cross-section of Salisburians, starting with artist Meg Edgar, who acts as a barometer for the citizens' fear and bewilderment. Skripal, who was spiked with a powerful nerve agent, novichok, is profiled with help from the journalist Mark Urban. The government is represented by the then home secretary Amber Rudd and then prime minister Theresa May. Whether the UK could have taken more retributive action is barely discussed. It's not quite comprehensive, but still a nicely busy documentary. *Jack Seale*

Ted Lasso
Apple TV
★★★☆☆

The 13-time Emmy-winning show returns. Ted left the UK at the top of his game, ultimately choosing fatherhood over riches, professional triumph and beloved colleagues. What could possibly change his mind? Being offered the job of managing the women's team, who are languishing in the second division. Obviously, Ted declines. But then his mother – the same mother who last season persuaded him to come home – encourages him to go back. So he asks his son and his estranged wife to come. With little explanation, they agree. For all its irritatingly ersatz qualities, the appeal of Ted Lasso is clear as ever: the signposted comic beats, the gestures towards kindness, the bright colours, the clean lines. It is, no doubt, still a lot of people's cup of tea. *Rachel Aroesti*

FX; KEN MCKAY/ITV/SHUTTERSTOCK

Podcasts

Pick of the week

Matt Baker's Petcast
Widely available, episodes weekly
This series by Blue Peter and One Show alumnus Matt Baker is a wholesome entry into the well-worn celebrity interview genre. Indeed, it's hard to be too cynical when you're listening to Bill Bailey detail his menagerie, which has included everything from parrots and lizards to armadillos and the dog he is ostensibly on the show to talk about, a Japanese chin named Chocho. Other guests for this run include Martin Clunes and Clare Balding. *Hannah J Davies*

History Hit: The Rise of the Maya
Widely available, episodes weekly
Two new episodes make up this special release from Dan Snow's super-popular pod – one on the rise of the advanced ancient civilisation and another on its fall. Direct from Belize (the series is co-signed by the country's tourist board), Snow looks at Mayan society and its darker recesses. *HJD*

The Mangione Trial
Widely available, episodes weekly
Luigi Mangione will go on trial in New York in September, accused of killing UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson. Cue another run of this insightful – if tabloid-flavoured – podcast hosted by Jordan Dunbar. It considers some of the wider themes, beginning with "pretty privilege" and the potential role that Mangione's looks have played in the public's treatment of him. *HJD*

Why Are You Like This?
Widely available, episodes weekly
US football icon Megan Rapinoe (pictured above right) is dripping with charisma as she pivots to podcasting. Her show doesn't break

the mould, highlighting public figures who "[refuse] to accept the status quo". But it's nicely done – the episode with Minnesota WNBA coach Cheryl Reeve delves into activism, sexuality and Reeves's "unprecedented slogan shirt collection". *HJD*

Time Travelling Queers
Widely available, episodes weekly from Tuesday
While King Edward II's sexuality remains a question mark, starting a civil war over the fate of a companion was – reckons Drag Race UK's Tia Kofi – "pretty gay behaviour". He's one of the historical figures studied in this fun series by drag king Don One, which will also feature a gender-fluid, 16th-century Congolese queen. *HJD*

Radio

August in Manchester
Sat, 3pm, Radio 4
Romance on the tube? Yes please! This one-off drama features Leigh (Rebekah Staton) and Rick (Samuel Anderson), old friends from Manchester, as they bump into each other on the train and quickly start reminiscing about three Augusts in the past. It first takes us back to 1996, when the pair meet outside a house party and hit it off – but they don't end up leaving together. They haven't stopped thinking about each other since. Might this belated TfL meet-cute bring them together? *Hollie Richardson*

Libra
Sun, 3pm, Radio 4
Don DeLillo's reimagining of the events running up to President Kennedy's assassination is expertly brought to life in this two-parter, which mixes uncertainty and conspiracy, fact and fiction. The story is largely told from the perspective of Fisher Stevens's CIA analyst, while Lee Harvey Oswald (Tucker St Ivany) is painted as just one piece of the jigsaw. A backdrop of other suspects and incidents leading up to JFK's death comes into focus. *Hannah Verdier*

Human Intelligence
Mon, 1.45pm, Radio 4
The new series of the programme about singular thinkers from across the ages, made in collaboration with the Open University, centres on recluses. If that sounds a little negative as a label, then Naomi Alderman's (pictured above) bite-size portrait of author Emily Brontë – who broke literary boundaries while rarely leaving the Yorkshire moors – shows that reclusedom can be a boon. Other figures featured across the week include Tunisian historian Ibn Khaldun and Chinese poet Li Qingzhao. *Hannah J Davies*

CrowdScience: Why Do I Think Like This?
Fri, 8.30pm, BBC World Service
In an age of increasingly unreliable, AI-powered internet search results, one place to go if you have a burning scientific question might be this World Service show hosted by Alex Lathbridge, which puts a mailbag of the public's questions in front of leading experts. This week is about concentration – what affects it, does music help or hinder us, and can listeners keep track of the numbers they hear in a deceptively hard play-along challenge? *HJD*

Pick of the week

Hamnet

Friday, 8.10am, 8pm, Sky Cinema Premiere

From a Roman muscle man (see right) to William Shakespeare, Paul Mescal is showing his range right now. But in Chloé Zhao's version of Maggie O'Farrell superb novel, he has to play second fiddle to Jessie Buckley. It's her Oscar-winning turn as Agnes – the Bard's unsung wife – that gives the drama its gut-wrenching power. Agnes is the heart to Will's brain, more attuned to the mysteries of the natural world, and aware that his genius will take him away from her. But their differing reactions to a family tragedy push them further apart … Hamnet is a difficult book to adapt, its potency coming from its unarticulated emotions, but Zhao has pulled it off brilliantly. *Simon Wardell*

Gladiator II

Wednesday, Netflix
It has taken 24 years for Ridley Scott to get back to the Colosseum. But there's still a lot of familiarity in his ancient Roman sequel – from returning characters to elaborate fight scenes and animal antics. Paul Mescal stars as Lucius, the son of Russell Crowe's Maximus, who is living a quiet life in north Africa until an invading Roman army take him into slavery. From there, it's a short hop to becoming a rebellious gladiator, under the gimlet gaze of his owner Macrinus (a lip-smacking Denzel Washington). *SW*

A Child of My Own

Thursday, Netflix
Maite Alberdi's documentary starts as a straightforward ripped-from-the-headlines dramatisation of a secret adoption, shot in the vibrant palette of a telenovela. Mexican hospital worker Alejandra has just had her third miscarriage when she meets Mayra, who doesn't want the baby she will give birth to. Mayra agrees to hand her newborn over to Alejandra, who meanwhile will pretend to be going through her own pregnancy. It's when their plan goes wrong that the film pulls the rug out from under the viewer. As other voices enter the frame, is the narrative we have been consuming true at all? *SW*

Sport

Women's Hundred Cricket
MI London v Trent Rockets
Sat, 11am, Sky Sports Main Event
From Kia Oval in London.

Cycling
Tour de France Femmes
Sat, 2.30pm, TNT Sports 1
Stage eight from Sisteron to Nice.

EFL Cup Football
Colchester v Southampton
Sat, 5pm, Sky Sports Main Event
On Sunday, Mansfield v Sheffield Utd is at 3.45pm. On Monday Plymouth v Exeter is at 7.45pm.

Men's Hundred Cricket
London Spirit v Birmingham Phoenix
Sun, 5.30pm, Sky Sports Cricket
At Lord's.

Athletics
European Championships
Mon, 10.30am, BBC One
Day one, including the women's 100m heats with champion Dina Asher-Smith (pictured above).

Pre-Season Football
Man United v Leeds
Wed, 7pm, ITV1
A friendly at Croke Park in Dublin.

Uefa Super Cup Football
Paris Saint-Germain v Aston Villa
Wed, 7pm, TNT Sport 1
At Red Bull Arena in Salzburg.

Super League Rugby
Leeds Rhinos v Leigh Leopards
Thu, 7.30pm, Sky Sports Main Event
At Headingley Stadium.

Championship Football
Wolves v Blackburn
Fri, 7.15pm, Sky Sports Main Event
The opening match of the season at Molineux.

AGATA GRZYBOWSKA/FOCUS FEATURES VIA AP

Parallel Mothers

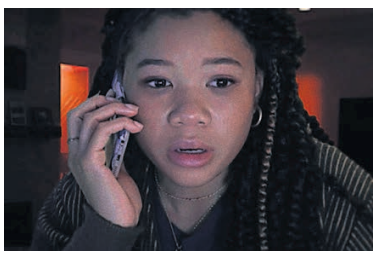
Saturday, 11.10pm, BBC Four
Just before his latest twisty film, Bitter Christmas, hits cinemas, here's another chance to see Pedro Almodóvar's equally knotty 2021 drama, which explores family secrets in the domestic and national spheres. It features a standout performance from Penélope Cruz as photographer Janis, who gets pregnant by a forensic anthropologist investigating the forgotten civil war victims of Franco – including her ancestors. When her newborn gets swapped with that of the young Ana (Milena Smit), fate intertwines their lives. A forceful experience. *SW*

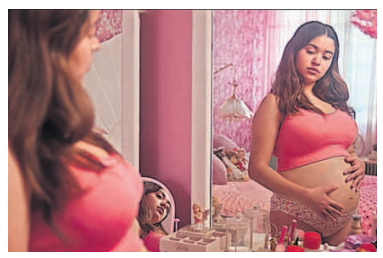
Speed

Sunday, 9pm, Film4
If Jan de Bont's 1994 action thriller didn't propel Keanu Reeves to stardom (Point Break arguably did that in 1991), it was his biggest box-office hit to date – and it was most definitely a breakthrough moment for Sandra Bullock. She is her co-star's equal as a passenger who has to take the steering wheel of an LA bus primed to explode if it goes under 50mph. Reeves has the more superficially heroic role as a police bomb disposal officer, but both have their moments in a terrifically tense series of freeway set-pieces, while Dennis Hopper is reliably unhinged as their foe. *SW*

Missing

Tuesday, 9pm, Film4
A thematic sequel to the 2018 film Searching, Nick Johnson and Will Merrick's 2023 thriller continues its conceit of restricting what we see to computer screens and smartphones. So after Storm Reid's June discovers her mother, Grace (Nia Long), has vanished while on holiday in Colombia with new boyfriend Kevin (Ken Leung), she uses the panoply of digital resources – voicemails, FaceTime, doorcams, even tourist webcams – to investigate remotely. It's all inherently claustrophobic, which helps generate a sustained level of unease and, soon enough, peril. *SW*





On Falling

Friday, 11.05pm, BBC Two
Portuguese immigrant Aurora (Joana Santos) works as a "picker" in an Amazon-style warehouse in Scotland. It's a monotonous but time-sensitive job that has reduced her to a zombie-like state; she's too tired and/or poor to enjoy her free time and struggles to connect with her mostly foreign colleagues and flatmates. And when her phone needs a costly repair, that's all it takes to tip her over the edge. Laura Carreira's debut feature is heart-breaking social realism with a Ken Loach feel, but where he rails at capitalism's evils, Carreira sees bureaucratic indifference. *SW*

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Saturday

Sandi Toksvig's Hidden Wonders, Channel 4

BBC One

6.0 **Breakfast** (T) **10.0** Saturday Kitchen Best Bites (T) **11.30** Anna Haugh's Big Irish Food Tour (T) (R) **12.0** Homes Under the Hammer (T) (R) **1.0** News (T) **1.10** Weather (T) **1.15** Bargain Hunt (T) (R) **2.15** Money for Nothing (T) (R) **3.15** Escape to the Country (T) (R) **4.15** FILM Night at the Museum: Secret of the Tomb (Shawn Levy, 2014) (T) **5.50** News (T) **6.0** Regional News (T) **6.05** Weather (T) **6.10** The Hit List Celebrity Special (T) **6.55** Alan Carr's Picture Slam (T) **7.40** Michael McIntyre's Big Show (T) (R)

8.35 **Pointless Celebrities** (T) (R) With Charlene White, Fern Britton, Chloe Madeley, James Haskell, Crystelle Pereira, Kwoklyn Wan, Phil Wang and Pierre Novellie.
9.25 **How Are You? It's Alan (Partridge)** (T) (R) Newly single and never happier, Alan throws himself into fresh experiences.

10.0 **News** (T) Weather
10.20 FILM **Bridget Jones's Diary** (Sharon Maguire, 2001) (T) Romantic comedy, starring Renée Zellweger, Hugh Grant and Colin Firth.
11.50 FILM **Man Up** (Ben Palmer, 2015) (T) Romantic comedy, starring Lake Bell.
1.15 **Weather for the Week Ahead** (T) **1.20** News (T)

BBC Two

6.30 **CBBC 6.50 CBeebies** (R) **9.15** Gardeners' World (T) (R) **10.15** FILM Angels One Five (George More O'Ferrall, 1953) (T) **11.50** The Great British Sewing Bee (T) (R) **12.50** A Cook Abroad: Monica Galetti's France (T) (R) **1.50** FILM Summer Holiday (Peter Yates, 1963) (T) **3.35** Fake Or Fortune? (T) (R) **4.35** Evolution (T) (R) **5.35** FILM Superman II (Richard Lester, 1980) (T)

7.35 **Space Soundtracks at the Proms** (T) Nick Mohammed celebrates music related to the universe, including R Strauss's Also Sprach Zarathustra and Holst's The Planets.
8.35 **Paul Heaton at the BBC** (T) Archive appearances by the former Housemartins and Beautiful South frontman.

10.10 Paul Heaton: Live at Bramall Lane (T) A 2025 concert at Sheffield United's stadium.
11.35 **The Housemartins in London 0 Hull 4** (T) (R) Documentary about the band from 1987.
12.20 **Top of the Pops: The Beautiful South** (T) **12.50** FILM Fallen Leaves (Aki Kaurismaki, 2023) **2.05** Sign Zone: The Rapture (T) (R)

ITV1

6.0 **James Martin's American Adventure** (T) (R) **7.0** FILM The Man With the Golden Gun (Guy Hamilton, 1974) (T) **9.25** News (T) **9.30** James Martin's Saturday Morning (T) (R) **12.0** Prue Leith's Cotswold Kitchen (T) (R) **1.0** News and Weather (T) **1.10** ITV Racing: Live from Ascot (T) **5.0** Tipping Point: Best Ever Finals (T) (R) **5.30** The Chase Celebrity Special (T) (R) **6.30** News and Weather (T) **6.45** Local News and Weather (T) **7.0** Deal Or No Deal: Celebrity Special (T)

8.0 FILM **Quantum of Solace** (Marc Forster, 2008) (T) James Bond sets out on a personal mission of vengeance and uncovers a plan to cause a coup in a Latin American country. Spy thriller sequel, starring Daniel Craig, Olga Kurylenko and Mathieu Amalric.

10.05 **News** (T) Weather
10.20 The Staircase (T) In 2003, the Petersons' eldest son Clayton returns home.
11.35 **Sorry, I Didn't Know** (T) (R) Black history panel show.
12.10 **Shop on TV 3.0** Cold Case Forensics: A Death on the Nile (T) (R) **3.50** Unwind With ITV (T) **5.0** Fern Britton: Inside the Vet's (T) (R)

Channel 4

6.10 **Cheers** (T) (R) **8.0** Everybody Loves Raymond (T) (R) **9.25** Frasier (T) (R) **9.55** Frasier (T) (R) **10.55** The Simpsons (T) (R) **12.55** Four in a Bed (T) (R) **3.30** The Dog House (T) (R) **4.30** Kirstie and Phil's Love It Or List It (T) (R) **5.35** Grand Designs (T) (R) **6.30** News (T) **7.0** Sandi Toksvig's Hidden Wonders (T)

8.0 Bettany Hughes' Lost Worlds: Dawn of Civilisations (T) Part one of two. The historian journeys across Turkey to uncover the origins of civilisation.
9.0 **Dictator: The Hitler Interviews** (T) Testimonies of contemporaries, who recall how tyranny took hold in 1930s Germany.

10.0 Elvis, the Colonel and the Mob (T) Part one of two.
11.05 **Elvis, the Colonel and the Mob** (T) Part two of two.
12.10 FILM **The Contractor** (2022) (T) **1.55** Ramy (T) **3.10** Ramsay's Hotel Hell (T) (R) **4.05** Location, Location, Location (T) (R) **5.0** The Simpsons (T) (R) **5.50** Cheers (T) (R)

Channel 5

6.0 **Milkshake! 9.05** Entertainment News (T) **9.10** Secrets of the Royal Palaces (T) (R) **11.0** Yorkshire's Poshest Hotel: Grantley Hall (T) (R) **1.0** The Royals: Uncensored (T) **2.0** Coastal Adventures With Helen, Jules & JB (T) (R) **4.0** Live: UK's Strongest Man 2026 (T) **6.55** News (T) **7.0** Sussex: Jewel of the South Coast (T)

8.0 **The Middletons: The Making of a Modern Queen** (T) (R) The family's journey from humble beginnings to their profound influence on the monarchy via daughter Kate.
9.30 **Kate: Our New Diana?** (T) (R) Comparing and contrasting the Princesses of Wales, Diana and Kate, who eventually took on her title.

10.30 **Diana & the Curse of the Spencers** (T) (R)
12.0 **We Love Bridget Jones: All the Laughter & More** (T) (R) **1.20** Cruise TV (T) (R) **2.20** GPs: Behind Closed Doors (T) (R) **3.10** Around the World in First Class With Josie Gibson (T) (R) **4.05** Friends (T) (R) **4.30** Yorkshire With Jane McDonald (T) (R)

BBC Four

7.0 **Natural World: Jungle Animal Hospital** (T) (R) **7.05** Life on Earth (T) (R) David Attenborough explores the lives of birds.

8.0 **Gloria: My Life on TV** (T) (R) Gloria Hunniford looks back at her life and career.
9.0 **Gloria Hunniford Remembers: Doris Day** (T) (R) The presenter recalls her 1995 interview.
9.15 **Doris Day: Pebble Mill Special** (T) (R)
9.55 **Wogan With Gloria Hunniford** (T) (R)

10.25 **The Val Doonican Music Show** (T) (R) With guest Gloria Hunniford. First broadcast in 1983.
11.10 FILM Parallel Mothers (Pedro Almodóvar, 2020) (T) Drama, starring Penélope Cruz and Milena Smit.
1.05 **Keeping Up Appearances** (T) (R) **1.35** To the Manor Born (T) (R) **2.05** Life on Earth (T) (R)

Other channels

BBC Three

7.0pm FILM Puss in Boots (2011) **8.20** Not Going Out **8.50** Not Going Out **9.20** Not Going Out **9.50** Mrs Brown's Boys New Year Special 2016 **10.20** Mrs Brown's Boys New Year Special 2017 **10.50** Ghosts Australia **11.15** Ghosts Australia **11.40** Ghosts Australia **12.05** Schitt's Creek **12.25** Schitt's Creek **12.45** Schitt's Creek **1.10** Schitt's Creek **1.30** Bluestone 42 **2.0** Bluestone 42 **2.30** Bluestone 42 **3.0** My Mate's a Bad Date **3.20** My Mate's a Bad Date

U&Dave

6.0am Teleshopping **7.25** Top Gear **8.20** Would I Lie to You? **9.0** Would I Lie to You? **9.40** Would I Lie to You? **10.20** Would I Lie to You? **11.0** Would I Lie to You? **11.40** Would I Lie to You? **12.20** Would I Lie to You? **1.0** Would I Lie to You? **1.40** Would I Lie to You? **2.20** Would I Lie to You? **3.0** Would I Lie to You? **3.40** Would I Lie to You? **4.20** Would I Lie to You? **5.0** Would I Lie to You? **5.40** Would I Lie to You? **6.20** Would I Lie to You? **7.0** Gavin & Stacey **7.40** Gavin & Stacey **8.20** Gavin & Stacey **9.0** QI **9.40** QI **10.20** Not Going Out **11.0** Not Going Out **11.40** Not Going Out **12.20** Not Going Out **1.0** Have I Got a Bit More News for You **2.0** Live at the Apollo **3.0** James May's Cars of the People **4.0** Teleshopping

E4

6.0am The Great Australian Bake Off **7.05** Rude(ish) Tube Shorts **7.15** Below Deck Down Under **8.15** Below Deck Down Under **9.15** Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA **10.15** Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA **11.15** Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA **12.15** Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA **1.15** FILM Cheaper By the Dozen 2 (2005) **3.10** The Simpsons **3.40** The Simpsons **4.10** The Simpsons **4.40** The Simpsons **5.10** The Simpsons **5.40** The Simpsons **6.10** The Simpsons **6.40** The Simpsons **7.15** FILM The Simpsons Movie (2007) **9.0** Celebrity Gogglebox **10.0** Gogglebox **11.05** Gogglebox **12.05** First Dates **1.10** Below Deck: Mediterranean **2.10** Below Deck: Mediterranean **3.0** Below Deck: Mediterranean **3.50** Brooklyn Nine-Nine **4.15** Brooklyn Nine-Nine **4.40** Brooklyn Nine-Nine **5.05** Brooklyn Nine-Nine **5.30** Brooklyn Nine-Nine

Film4

11.0am FILM Monkey Business (1952) **12.55** FILM Rat Race (2001) **3.10** FILM The Mark of Zorro (1974) **4.45** FILM Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Mutant Mayhem (2023) **6.50** FILM My Stepmother Is An Alien (1988) **9.0** FILM Twister (1996) **11.15** FILM Midnight Run (1988) **1.50** FILM Straightheads (2007)

PBS America

6.0am Teleshopping **8.0** A Final Landing on Iwo Jima **9.10** Pirates: Behind the Legends **10.05** Pirates: Behind the Legends **11.05** Pirates: Behind the Legends **12.0** Pirates: Behind the Legends **1.0** A Final Landing on Iwo Jima **2.10** Pirates: Behind the Legends **3.10** Pirates: Behind the Legends **4.10** Pirates: Behind the Legends **5.10** Pirates: Behind the Legends **6.10** A Final Landing on Iwo Jima **7.20** Hitler's Gold **8.25** Hitler's Gold **9.25** Hitler's Gold **10.25** Hitler's Gold **11.30** Weathered: Earth's Extremes **12.0** A Final Landing on Iwo Jima **1.15** Weathered: Earth's Extremes **2.0** Teleshopping

Sky One

6.0am Hawaii Five-0 **7.0** Hawaii Five-0 **8.0** La Brea **9.0** La Brea **10.0** Animal Control **10.30** Animal Control **11.0** Animal Control **11.30** The Simpsons **12.0** The Simpsons **12.30** The Simpsons **1.0** The Simpsons **1.30** The Simpsons **2.0** The Hundred Live **5.30** The Simpsons **6.0** The Simpsons **6.30** The Simpsons **7.0** Live Zuffa Boxing **11.0** FILM Rambo III (1988) **1.0** The Force: Manchester **2.0** The Force: Manchester **3.0** Road Wars **4.0** Road Wars **4.30** Road Wars **5.0** Highway Patrol **5.30** Highway Patrol

Midnight Run, Film4

Sky Arts

6.0am André Rieu: Happy Days Are Here Again **9.0** Tales of the Unexpected **11.0** The Alfred Hitchcock Hour **1.0** Grand Ole Opry: Opry Live **2.0** Discovering: Michael Caine **3.0** FILM Murder By Decree (1978) **5.20** Voices of the Valleys **6.20** Queen: Is This the Real Life? **7.30** Queen: Live at Wembley Stadium **9.55** Queen: Greatest Video Hits 1 **11.15** Queen: Greatest Video Hits 2 **12.55** The Stones in Exile **2.10** AC/DC Live at River Plate **4.35** Discovering: The Doors **5.0** Classic Albums

Sky Atlantic

6.0am Richard E Grant's Hotel Secrets **8.0** House of the Dragon **9.10** House of the Dragon **10.10** House of the Dragon **11.25** House of the Dragon **12.40** House of the Dragon **1.45** House of the Dragon **3.0** House of the Dragon **4.10** House of the Dragon **5.25** House of the Dragon **6.30** House of the Dragon **7.45** House of the Dragon **9.0** Possession **10.0** Possession **11.0** The Five-Star Weekend **12.45** All Her Fault **1.45** Homicide: Life on the Street **4.35** Sort Of **5.05** Urban Secrets

Radio

Radio 3

6.30am Breakfast **9.0** Saturday Morning. Tom Service talks to Thomas Adès. **12.0** Earlier... With Jools Holland. Singer and actor Ute Lemper guests. **1.0** Key Changes: Radio 3's Essential History of Classical Music. The French Revolution reaches its most violent phase. **2.0** Record Review. Prof Nigel Simeone picks his top five recordings by Haydn. **4.0** Sound of Cinema. With composer Harry Escott and illustrator and author Helen Oxenbury. **5.0** BBC Proms 2026. Live at Bristol Beacon, Adam Hickox conducts the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra and cellist Maximilian Hornung in Shostakovich's Festive Overture and Cello Concerto No 1 in E flat major, Gubaidulina's Fairy-Tale Poem and Rachmaninov's Symphonic Dances. **7.30** BBC Proms 2026. Live from the Royal Albert Hall, Thomas Adès conducts the National Youth Orchestra in Liszt's Mephisto Waltz No 1, Adès's Dante: Part 2 – Purgatorio and Berlioz's Symphonie Fantastique. **9.40** BBC Proms 2026. From Bristol Beacon, Charles Hazlewood conducts Paraorchestra, with choreographer Faye Stoeser, in Reich's Music for 18 Musicians. **11.0** New Music Show **12.30** Through the Night

Radio 4

6.0am News and Papers **6.07** This Natural Life (R) **6.30** Farming Today This Week **6.57** Weather **7.0** Today **9.0** What Happened to Counter-Culture? (R) **9.30** What's Up Docs? (R) **10.0** You're Dead to Me. Greg Jenner is joined by Prof Lucy Grig and comedian Ivo Graham to learn all about Emperor Constantine the Great and the Christianisation of the Roman empire. (7/13) **10.30** The Kitchen Cabinet (6/6) **11.0** Radical (R) **11.30** From Our Own Correspondent **12.0** News **12.04** Toast. A look back at EasyJet's failed move into cinemas. (2/4) **12.30** Current-ish (R) **12.57** Weather **1.0** News **1.10** Any Questions? (R) **2.05** Any Answers? **2.45** The Archers (R) **3.0** August in Manchester Drama, by Katie Hims. A woman is reunited by chance with the man she never stopped wondering about. With Rebekah Staton and Samuel Anderson. **4.0** Weekend Woman's Hour **5.0** Saturday PM **5.30** Sliced Bread (R) **5.54** Shipping Forecast **5.57** Weather **6.0** News **6.15** Loose Ends. As Belfast hosts Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann for the first time, Stuart Maconie chats to historian Emma Southon, comedian Michael Fry and podcaster Olivia McVeigh. Plus, music from Clare Sands and Dónal O'Connor. **7.0** Last Word: Doing Death Differently (R) **7.15** Changing the Odds (R) **8.0** Archive on 4: Writing Our Mothers (R) **9.0** Ten Fights That Made the Green Movement: Omnibus – Part One (R) **10.0** News **10.15** The Food Programme (R) **11.0** Olga Koch: OK Computer (R) **11.30** Brain of Britain (R) **12.0** News **12.15** Bookclub (R) **12.48** Shipping Forecast **1.0** As World Service **5.30** News **5.34** Shipping Forecast **5.43** Bells on Sunday **5.45** In Touch (R)

Radio 4 Extra

6.0am Conflict of Doves **7.30** Blue Machine: How the Ocean Shapes Our World **8.45** Inner Voices (3/4) **9.0** The Random Jottings of Hinge and Bracket **9.30** Brothers in Law (6/13) **10.0** Sisters in Satire: The Pioneering Women of Comedy (1/3) **11.0** Conflict of Doves **12.30** Blue Machine: How the Ocean Shapes Our World **1.45** Inner Voices (3/4) **2.0** The Random Jottings of Hinge and Bracket **2.30** Brothers in Law (6/13) **3.0** Sisters in Satire: The Pioneering Women of Comedy (1/3) **4.0** The War of the Worlds (1/2) **5.0** Conflict of Doves **6.30** Blue Machine: How the Ocean Shapes Our World **7.45** Inner Voices (3/4) **8.0** The Random Jottings of Hinge and Bracket **8.30** Brothers in Law (6/13) **9.0** Sisters in Satire: The Pioneering Women of Comedy (1/3) **10.0** Comedy Club: Any Bloke (3/6) **10.30** Ken Cheng: Chinese Comedian (1/4) **10.45** Ida Barr: Artificial Hip Hop (1/4) **10.55** The Comedy Club Interview **11.0** Tom Wrigglesworth's Hang-Ups (5/6) **11.30** Radio Active (5/8) **12.0** The War of the Worlds (1/2) **1.0** Conflict of Doves **2.30** Blue Machine: How the Ocean Shapes Our World **3.45** Inner Voices (3/4) **4.0** The Random Jottings of Hinge and Bracket **4.30** Brothers in Law (6/13) **5.0** Sisters in Satire: The Pioneering Women of Comedy (1/3)

Sunday

Van Der Valk, ITV1

BBC One

6.0 **Breakfast** (T) **9.0** News (T) **10.0** Prayer and Reflection (T) (R) **10.30** Pilgrimage (T) (R) **11.30** Money for Nothing (T) (R) **12.15** Bargain Hunt (T) (R) **1.0** News (T) **1.10** Weather for the Week (T) **1.15** Songs of Praise (T) **1.50** FILM Ruby Gillman, Teenage Kraken (2023) (T) **3.15** Wallace & Gromit: A Grand Day Out (T) (R) **3.35** The Mating Game (T) (R) **4.35** Homes Under the Hammer (T) (R) **5.35** News (T) **5.50** Regional News (T) **5.55** Weather (T) **6.0** Escape to the Country (T) (R) **7.0** Countryfile (T)

8.0 **Antiques Roadshow** (T) (R) Fiona Bruce presents from Clissold Park in London, where treasures include some pricey whisky bottles and a ring by Mocheh Oved.
9.0 **The Rapture** (T) CCTV raises doubts over Bethany's honesty, while Gabs turns to the Climate Front for help. Last in the series.

10.0 **News** (T)
10.25 **Regional News** (T) Weather
10.30 FILM **Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason** (Beeban Kidron, 2004) (T) Comedy sequel, starring Renée Zellweger, Colin Firth and Hugh Grant.
12.10 **Who Do You Think You Are?** (T) (R) **1.10** Weather for the Week Ahead (T) **1.15** News (T)

BBC Two

6.20 **A to Z of TV Gardening** (T) (R) **7.05** Glorious Gardens from Above (T) (R) **7.50** Countryfile (T) (R) **8.50** Best of Weatherman Walking (T) **9.20** Beechgrove Garden (T) (R) **9.50** Saturday Kitchen Best Bites (T) (R) **11.20** Indian Food Made Easy (T) (R) **11.50** Indian Food Made Easy (T) (R) **12.20** FILM The Man Who Knew Too Much (Alfred Hitchcock, 1956) (T) **2.15** Cricket: The Hundred (T) London Spirit Women v Birmingham Phoenix Women (start-time 2.30pm).

6.0 **Cricket: The Hundred** (T) London Spirit Men v Birmingham Phoenix Men (start-time 6pm). Coverage of the match at Lord's.
9.30 **Live at the Apollo** (T) (R) Comedians Celya AB and Neil Delamere perform standup at the Hammersmith Apollo, hosted by Lou Sanders.

10.0 FILM **Inside Llewyn Davis** (Ethan Coen, Joel Coen, 2013) (T) Drama, starring Oscar Isaac.
11.40 FILM **Lady Macbeth** (William Oldroyd, 2016) (T) Drama.
1.05 **Sign Zone** Who Do You Think You Are? (T) (R) **2.05** Ann Droid (T) (R) **2.35** The Devil in the Family: The Fall of Ruby Franke (T) (R)

ITV1

6.0 **James Martin's American Adventure** (T) (R) **7.0** James Martin's Saturday Morning (T) (R) **9.25** News (T) **9.30** Love Your Weekend (T) (R) **11.25** Fern Britton: Inside the Vet's (T) **12.25** Tom Kerridge Cooks Italy (T) (R) **12.55** News and Weather (T) **1.05** Force of Nature (T) (R) **2.05** FILM The Spy Who Loved Me (Lewis Gilbert, 1977) (T) **4.30** The Chase Around the World (T) (R) **5.35** News and Weather (T) **5.45** Local News and Weather (T) **6.0** **Force of Nature** (T) **7.0** Emmerdale (T) **7.30** Coronation Street (T)

8.0 **Van Der Valk** (T) Piet and the team are called in when an environmental campaigner is murdered on the eve of a global conference. Crime drama, with Marc Warren and Maimie McCoy.

10.0 **News** (T) Weather
10.15 **Inside Iran: War & Revolution** (T) Documentary.
11.30 **Inside the Langham: Britain's First Grand Hotel** (T) (R) The hostelry's CEO arrives in London from head office.
12.0 **Shop on TV 3.0** Terror in the Skies (T) (R) **4.05** Unwind With ITV (T) **5.05** Motorsport UK (T) (R)

Channel 4

6.20 **Cheers** (T) (R) **7.15** Everybody Loves Raymond (T) (R) **8.30** The Simpsons (T) (R) **10.0** Sunday Brunch (T) **1.0** Jamie Cooks the Mediterranean (T) (R) **2.0** Our Farm Next Door: Amanda, Clive and Kids (T) (R) **3.05** Worst House on the Street (T) (R) **4.05** Kirstie and Phil's Love It Or List It: Brilliant Builds (T) (R) **4.40** FILM Sister Act 2: Back in the Habit (Bill Duke, 1993) (T) **6.35** News (T) **7.0** Gogglebox (T)

8.0 **Richard E Grant's Very Modern Odyssey** (T) The actor visits Sicily, the home of Cyclops, where he discovers the secrets of a temple and performs in an amphitheatre.
9.0 **The Piano** (T) Internationally acclaimed musician Alice Sara Ott joins the search for Britain's most remarkable amateur pianists.

10.0 **Celebrity Gogglebox** (T) (R)
11.0 FILM **How to Have Sex** (Molly Manning Walker, 2023) (T) Coming-of-age drama.
12.50 FILM **Old** (M Night Shyamalan, 2021) (T) **2.35** Ramsay's Hotel Hell (T) (R) **3.25** Couples Come Dine With Me (T) (R) **4.15** Fur Babies (T) (R) **5.10** The Dog House (T) (R) **5.50** Countdown (T) (R)

Channel 5

6.0 **Milkshake! 9.05** Entertainment News (T) **9.10** FILM Paw Patrol: The Mighty Movie (Cal Brunker, 2023) (T) **11.0** Happy Campers: The Caravan Park (T) (R) **12.0** Cruising With Susan Calman (T) (R) **2.0** Jane McDonald in Nashville (T) (R) **4.0** Live: UK's Strongest Man 2026 – The Final (T) **6.55** News (T) **7.0** The 1970s Diet: Could It Work for You? (T) (R)

8.0 **Dogs Behaving (Very) Badly** (T) (R) Graeme Hall travels to a pub in Essex where a doberman's antisocial behaviour keeps riling the regulars.
9.0 **Inside the Four Seasons: Park Lane** (T) Concierge manager Adam juggles two major celebrations at Four Seasons Hampshire.

10.0 **When Package Holidays Go Horribly Wrong** (T) (R)
11.35 **A Very British Sex Scandal: The Earl & the Escort** (T) (R)
1.0 **Cruise TV** (T) (R) **2.0** GPs: Behind Closed Doors (T) (R) **2.50** Tom Read Wilson's Grand Tour (T) (R) **3.45** Friends (T) (R) **4.30** Yorkshire With Jane McDonald (T) (R) **5.25** Entertainment News (T)

BBC Four

7.0 **Eisteddfod 2026 With Huw Stephens** (T) Highlights from the festival held in Llantwd, Pembrokeshire.

8.0 **NYO at the Proms** (T) Thomas Adès conducts the National Youth Orchestra in Liszt's Mephisto Waltz No 1, his own Dante: Part 2 – Purgatorio and Berlioz's Symphonie Fantastique.
9.40 **The Brontës Lived Here: Writers' Houses** (T) (R) Author Margaret Drabble visits Haworth Parsonage.

10.0 **Lady Antonia Fraser Remembers: The Birthday Party** (T)
10.10 **The Birthday Party** (T) (R) A 1987 adaptation of Harold Pinter's play.
11.55 **Arena: Harold Pinter – Part 1: The Room** (T) (R) **12.55** **Arena: Harold Pinter – Part 2: Celebration** (T) (R) **1.55** NYO at the Proms (T) (R)

Other channels

BBC Three

7.0pm EastEnders **7.30** EastEnders **8.0** EastEnders **8.30** EastEnders **9.0** FILM You're Cordially Invited (2025) **10.40** Such Brave Girls **11.05** Such Brave Girls **11.35** Such Brave Girls **12.0** Such Brave Girls **12.25** Such Brave Girls **12.55** Such Brave Girls **1.20** Things You Should Have Done **1.50** Things You Should Have Done **2.20** Things You Should Have Done **2.50** BBC New Comedy Awards 2025 **3.20** BBC New Comedy Awards 2025

U&Dave

6.0am Teleshopping **7.10** Top Gear **8.0** Yukon Gold **9.0** Yukon Gold **10.0** Red Bull Soapbox Race 2017: London **1.0** Mortimer & Whitehouse: Gone Fishing **1.40** Mortimer & Whitehouse: Gone Fishing **2.20** Mortimer & Whitehouse: Gone Fishing **3.0** The Hairy Bikers' Chicken and Egg **4.0** The Hairy Bikers' Chicken and Egg **5.0** Would I Lie to You? **5.40** Would I Lie to You? The Unseen Bits **6.20** Would I Lie to You? **7.0** Guy Martin: Proper Jobs **8.0** Special Ops: Crime Squad UK **9.0** Have I Got a Bit More News for You **10.0** QI **10.40** Mock the Week **11.20** Mock the Week **12.0** Live at the Apollo **1.0** Live at the Apollo **2.0** QI XL **3.05** Parks and Recreation **4.0** Teleshopping

E4

6.0am Hollyoaks Omnibus **7.10** The Great Australian Bake Off **8.30** FILM Ron's Gone Wrong (2021) **10.40** Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA **11.35** Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA **12.35** Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA **1.35** Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA **2.35** The Simpsons **3.05** The Simpsons **3.35** The Simpsons **4.05** The Simpsons **4.35** The Simpsons **5.05** The Simpsons **5.35** The Simpsons **6.0** The Simpsons **6.35** Cruising Paradise: Above and Below Deck **7.40** FILM Oblivion (2013) **10.0** FILM American Reunion (2012) **12.15** Gogglebox 2022 **2.20** Below Deck: Mediterranean **4.0** Brooklyn Nine-Nine **4.25** Hollyoaks Omnibus

Film4

11.0am FILM Paw Patrol: The Movie (2021) **12.40** FILM My Spy (2020) **2.35** FILM Mr Hobbs Takes a Vacation (1962) **4.55** FILM 10 Things I Hate About You (1999) **6.50** FILM The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen (2003) **9.0** FILM **Speed** (1994) **11.15** FILM Kingsman: The Secret Service (2015) **1.50** FILM To Kill a King (2003)

PBS America

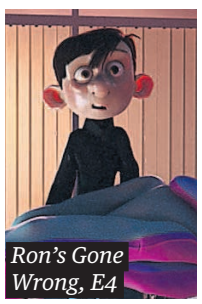
6.0am Teleshopping **8.0** The Anti-Soviet Fighters **9.20** Iron Curtain: Living Under Soviet Occupation **10.35** Iron Curtain: Living Under Soviet Occupation **11.50** Iron Curtain: Living Under Soviet Occupation **1.0** Fight to the Finish **2.30** Hunting the KGB Killers **3.40** The Rosenbergs: Atomic Spies **4.55** Eclipse Across Europe **6.0** The Anti-Soviet Fighters **7.15** Iron Curtain: Living Under Soviet Occupation **8.30** Iron Curtain: Living Under Soviet Occupation **9.40** Iron Curtain: Living Under Soviet Occupation **10.55** Eclipse Across Europe **12.0** Fight to the Finish **2.0** Teleshopping

Sky One

6.0am S.W.A.T **6.55** S.W.A.T **7.50** S.W.A.T **8.45** A Cheetah's Pride **9.45** Macaque Island **10.45** The Hundred Live **2.0** The Simpsons **2.30** The Simpsons **3.0** The Simpsons **3.30** The Simpsons **4.0** Best Medicine **5.0** Animal Control **5.30** Animal Control **6.0** Animal Control **6.30** Animal Control **7.0** The Simpsons **7.30** The Simpsons **8.0** Rob & Romesh vs Magic in Vegas **9.0** FILM Lethal Weapon (1987) **11.0** Tom Davis: Underdog **12.15** La Brea **1.15** La Brea **2.15** The Walking Dead: Dead City **3.10** Road Wars **4.05** Road Wars **5.0** Highway Patrol **5.30** Highway Patrol

Sky Arts

6.0am Bregenz: Madama Butterfly **8.20** Tales of the Unexpected **8.55** Tales of the Unexpected **9.30** Tales of the Unexpected **10.0** Tales of the Unexpected **10.30** Tales of the Unexpected **11.0** The Alfred Hitchcock Hour **12.0** The Alfred Hitchcock Hour **1.0** The Very Best of Peter Sellers **2.10** Voices of the Valleys **3.10** André Rieu: Dancing Through the Skies **5.0** Jeff Beck: Live in Tokyo **7.0** Grand Ole Opry: Opry Live **8.0** Dire Straits: Alchemy 1983 **10.0** Johnson & Knopfler's Music Legends **11.0** Motörhead: Louder Than Everything Else **12.30** Deep Purple: Perfect Strangers **3.0** Oasis: There and Then **4.55** Classic Albums


Ron's Gone Wrong, E4

Sky Atlantic

6.0am Richard E Grant's Hotel Secrets **8.0** House of the Dragon **9.0** House of the Dragon **10.10** House of the Dragon **11.20** House of the Dragon **12.30** House of the Dragon **1.45** House of the Dragon **3.0** House of the Dragon **4.10** House of the Dragon **5.15** House of the Dragon **6.30** House of the Dragon **7.45** House of the Dragon **9.0** House of the Dragon **10.15** Gomorrah: The Origins **11.15** Gomorrah: The Origins **12.15** Homicide: Life on the Street **1.10** Homicide: Life on the Street **2.0** House of the Dragon **3.20** Billions **4.20** Urban Secrets **5.10** Urban Secrets

Radio

Radio 3

6.30am Breakfast **9.0** Sunday Morning. Sarah Walker is live from Bristol. **12.0** Private Passions. Michael Berkeley chats to actor Richard Armitage. (R) **1.30** Music Map. Sara Mohr-Pietsch focuses on Debussy's La Mer. **3.0** Jazz Record Requests **4.0** BBC Proms 2026. Live from St George's Bristol, Nigel Short conducts Tenebrae in Joby Talbot's Path of Miracles. **5.30** New Generation Artists **6.0** Choral Evensong (R) **7.0** BBC Proms 2026. Live from the Royal Albert Hall, Peter Whelan conducts the Orchestra and Choir of the Age of Enlightenment, soprano Erin Morley, mezzo Helen Charlston, tenor Guy Cutting and bass William Thomas in Zelenka's Miserere in C minor, Mozart's Masonic Funeral Music and arias Schon Lacht Der Holde Frühling and Vorrei Spiegarvi, Oh Dio!, and Haydn's Mass in D minor, "Nelson Mass". **9.0** BBC Proms 2026. From Bristol Beacon, soprano Anu Komsi and violinist Sakari Oramo perform Kurtág's Kafka Fragments. **10.0** Night Tracks **11.30** Unclassified (R) **12.30** Through the Night

Radio 4

6.0am News **6.05** Heart and Soul (R) **6.35** On Your Farm. Vernon Harwood meets Andrew Tanner and his sheeted Somerset cattle. **6.57** Weather **7.0** News **7.10** Sunday Papers **7.10** Sunday **7.54** Radio 4 Appeal **7.57** Weather **8.0** News **8.0** Sunday Papers (R) **8.10** Sunday Worship **8.48** Witness History (R) **8.58** Tweet of the Day **9.0** Broadcasting House **10.0** Desert Island Discs. With Prof Dame Pamela Shaw. **11.0** The Archers: Omnibus (R) **12.15** Last Word: Doing Death Differently (R) **12.30** Just a Minute (R) **12.57** Weather **1.0** The World This Weekend **1.30** Burnham's Pledge. Kevin Core reports on Andy Burnham's plan to tackle rough sleeping. **2.0** Gardeners' Question Time (R) **2.45** Opening Lines. John Yorke examines Don DeLillo's 1988 novel Libra, which reimagines the assassination of JFK from the perspective of a CIA analyst. **3.0** **Libra** Ben Lewis's dramatic adaptation of Don DeLillo's novel. With Fisher Stevens. (1/2) **4.0** Take Four Books. David Sedaris discusses his new collection of essays, The Land and Its People. **4.30** Brain of Britain (3/17) **5.0** Witness History (R) **5.10** Behind the Crime (R) **5.54** Shipping Forecast **5.57** Weather **6.0** News **6.15** Pick of the Week **7.0** The Archers **7.15** James Hutton and the Restless Earth. Karine Polwart contemplates deep geological time. **7.45** Just One Thing With Michael Mosley (R) **8.0** Feedback (R) **8.30** Last Word (R) **9.0** Toast (R) **9.26** Radio 4 Appeal (R) **9.30** From Our Own Correspondent (R) **9.59** Weather **10.0** Archive on 4: It Must Be Wonderful to Be Free (R) **11.0** Great Lives (R) **11.30** More Wow (R) **11.45** Short Works. Parys, Anglesey, by Fflur Dafydd. (R) **12.0** News **12.15** Crossing Continents (R) **12.45** Bells on Sunday (R) **12.48** Shipping Forecast **1.0** As World Service **5.0** News **5.04** Last Word (R) **5.32** Weather **5.34** Shipping Forecast **5.43** Prayer for the Day **5.45** Farming Today

Radio 4 Extra

6.0am Desert Island Discs Revisited **6.45** David Attenborough's Life Stories **7.0** Poetry Extra **7.30** Following Pappano Omnibus **8.40** Inheritance Tracks **8.50** Small Island (2/15) **10.0** Know Your Place (7/8) **10.30** Take It from Here **11.0** Desert Island Discs Revisited **11.45** David Attenborough's Life Stories **12.0** Poetry Extra **12.30** Following Pappano Omnibus **1.40** Inheritance Tracks **1.50** Small Island (2/15) **3.0** Know Your Place (7/8) **3.30** Take It from Here **4.0** Between Ballard's Ears **4.30** The Queen of Spades **5.0** Desert Island Discs Revisited **5.45** David Attenborough's Life Stories **6.0** Poetry Extra **6.30** Following Pappano Omnibus **7.40** Inheritance Tracks **7.50** Small Island (2/15) **9.0** Know Your Place (7/8) **9.30** Take It from Here **10.0** Comedy Club: Revolting People (6/6) **10.30** Alexei Sayle's Strangers on a Train (6/6) **11.0** In and Out of the Kitchen (4/6) **11.30** Electric Ink (6/6) **12.0** Between Ballard's Ears **12.30** The Queen of Spades **1.0** Desert Island Discs Revisited **1.45** David Attenborough's Life Stories **2.0** Poetry Extra **2.30** Following Pappano Omnibus **3.40** Inheritance Tracks **3.50** Small Island (2/15) **5.0** Know Your Place (7/8) **5.30** Take It from Here

Monday

Shaft, BBC Two

BBC One

6.0 **Breakfast** (T) **9.30** Animal Park (T) (R) **10.0** Trace, Track, Get My Car Back (T) (R) **10.30** European Athletics Championships: Birmingham 2026 (T) **1.15** News (T) **1.40** Regional News and Weather (T) **1.50** News (T) **2.0** Money for Nothing (T) **2.45** Escape to the Country (T) (R) **3.30** The Repair Shop (T) (R) **4.30** The Answer Run (T) **5.15** Pointless (T) (R) **6.0** News (T) **6.30** Regional News and Weather (T) **7.0** The One Show (T) **7.30** EastEnders (T)

8.0 **European Athletics Championships: Birmingham 2026** (T) Gabby Logan presents further coverage of the evening session on day one from Alexander Stadium, including the women's 100m final.

10.0 **News** (T)
10.30 **Regional News** (T) Weather
10.40 FILM **Bridget Jones's Baby** (Sharon Maguire, 2016) (T) After a pair of one-night stands, Bridget Jones winds up pregnant. Comedy sequel, starring Renée Zellweger and Colin Firth.
12.35 **Weather for the Week Ahead** (T) **12.40** News (T)

BBC Two

6.30 **Bargain Hunt: 20 Years of the One Show** (T) (R) **7.15** Money for Nothing (T) (R) **8.0** Sign Zone: The Repair Shop (T) (R) **9.0** News (T) **10.30** Antiques Road Trip (T) (R) **11.15** Homes Under the Hammer (T) (R) **12.15** Bargain Hunt (T) (R) **1.0** House of Games (T) (R) **1.30** The Finish Line (T) (R) **2.15** Do You Know Your Place? (T) (R) **2.45** The Farmers' Country Showdown (T) (R) **3.30** Spy in the Ocean (T) (R) **4.30** Vintage Antiques Roadshow (T) (R) **5.15** Flog It! (T) (R) **6.0** House of Games (T) (R) **6.30** Wild Reckoning (T) (R)

7.0 **European Athletics Championships: Birmingham 2026** (T) Day one coverage.
8.0 **Only Connect** (T) Double Features take on the Colonial Geese in the first round.
8.30 **University Challenge** (T) Magdalen College, Oxford v University of Warwick.
9.0 **Evolution** (T) With Chris Packham. Last in the series.

10.0 **Mortimer & Whitehouse: Gone Fishing** (T) (R) The pair visit the River Garry.
10.30 **Newsnight** (T) Weather
11.05 FILM **Shaft** (Gordon Parks, 1971) (T) Blaxploitation thriller, starring Richard Roundtree and Moses Gunn.
12.40 **Sign Zone** Countryfile (T) (R) **1.35** Bergerac (T) (R) **2.25** This Is BBC Two (T)

ITV1

6.0 **Good Morning Britain** (T) **10.0** This Morning (T) **1.30** News and Weather (T) **1.55** Local News and Weather (T) **2.0** Dickinson's Real Deal (T) (R) **3.0** Deal Or No Deal (T) (R) **4.0** Tipping Point (T) (R) **5.0** The Chase (T) (R) **6.0** Local News and Weather (T) **6.30** News and Weather (T) **7.30** Fletchers' Family Farm (T) (R)

8.0 **Emmerdale** (T) Charity clings to her secret and Serena is left feeling conflicted.
8.30 **Coronation Street** (T) Tim urges Richie to make a go of his marriage.
9.0 **Long Lost Family: Born Without Trace** (T) Davina McCall and Nicky Campbell help foundlings Michael and Christine uncover their past.

10.0 **News** (T) Weather
10.30 **Local News** (T) Weather
10.45 **Cold Case Forensics: A Death on the Nile** (T) (R) A British solicitor on holiday in Egypt suddenly dies.
11.45 **Love & Death** (T) (R)
12.35 **Shop on TV 3.0** The Staircase (T) (R) **4.10** Unwind With ITV (T) **5.10** Dickinson's Real Deal (T) (R)

Channel 4

6.30 **The King of Queens** (T) (R) **7.45** Everybody Loves Raymond (T) (R) **9.10** Frasier (T) (R) **11.10** Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA (T) (R) **12.05** News (T) **12.10** Find It, Fix It, Flog It (T) (R) **1.10** The Great House Giveaway (T) (R) **2.10** Countdown (T) **3.0** A Place in the Sun (T) (R) **4.0** Saving Country Houses With Penelope Keith (T) (R) **5.0** Chateau DIY (T) (R) **6.0** American Pickers (T) (R) **7.0** News (T)

8.0 **Martin and Roman's Irish Road Trip** (T) New series. Father and son Martin and Roman Kemp explore Ireland, beginning in Cork.
9.0 **Celebrity Hunted** (T) A daring escape plot is hatched in Brighton, while two of the famous faces tap into a military network for intel and support.

10.0 **Secret Lives of Gypsy Wives** (T) Documentary.
11.05 **Surgery Secrets of the Super Rich** (T) (R)
12.05 **Celebrity Sex Tapes** (T) **12.55** Ramsay's Hotel Hell (T) (R) **1.50** Digital Detectives (T) (R) **2.40** FILM Saba (2024) **4.20** Find It, Fix It, Flog It (T) (R) **4.40** Hollyoaks (T) (R) **5.50** Countdown (T) (R)

Channel 5

6.0 **Milkshake! 9.15** Jeremy Vine (T) **11.30** Storm & Alexis (T) **12.45** News (T) **12.50** Matt Allwright (T) **2.20** FILM My Fatal Memory (Gigi Gaston, 2022) (T) **4.0** Castle (T) (R) **4.55** Love Nature (T) (R) **5.0** News (T) **6.0** Sardinia: Jewel of the Med (T) (R) **6.55** News (T) **7.0** Motorway Cops: Catching Britain's Speeders (T) (R) **7.55** News (T)

8.0 **Street Cops: Catching the Yobs** (T) Josh hunts down an e-biker who appears to chuck something in the bushes while running from the law.
9.0 **Fare Dodgers: At War With the Law** (T) Transport for London investigators hunt for a suspected fare evader who owes the network almost £4,000.

10.0 **Police Interceptors: Taking Down the Shoplifting Gangs** (T) (R)
11.05 **Traffic Cops** (T) (R)
12.05 **Car Pound Cops** (T) (R) **1.0** Cruise TV (T) (R) **2.0** GPs: Behind Closed Doors (T) (R) **2.50** Castle (T) (R) **3.40** Friends (T) (R) **4.30** Yorkshire With Jane McDonald (T) (R) **5.25** Entertainment News (T)

BBC Four

7.0 **The Architecture the Railways Built** (T) (R) Tim Dunn explores the disused tube station Down Street in Mayfair. **7.40** The Flying Gardener (T) (R) Vertical gardening in the Cotswolds.

8.0 **The Art of Spain** (T) (R) A trip through the provinces surrounding Madrid.
9.0 **Mastermind** (T) (R) Magnus Magnusson hosts the first heat of the 1977 run of the general knowledge quiz.
9.30 **Call My Bluff** (T) (R) With Nanette Newman, Bryan Forbes, Joanna Lumley and Russell Harty. From 1977.

10.0 **The Sky at Night** (T)
10.30 **Omnibus: The Golden Age of Spanish Painting** (T) (R)
11.20 **One Hundred Great Paintings** (T) (R)
11.35 **Britain's Lost Waterlands** (R)
12.35 **The Flying Gardener** (T) (R) **12.50** Art of Spain (T) (R) **1.50** The Golden Age of Spanish Painting (T) (R) **2.40** Britain's Lost Waterlands (T) (R)

Other channels

BBC Three

7.0pm The Catch Up **7.05** Deadly 60 **7.30** Deadly 60 **8.0** The Great British Sewing Bee **9.0** Top Gear: Burma Special **10.05** Top Gear: Burma Special **11.05** Tommy: The Good. The Bad. The Fury **11.35** Tommy: The Good. The Bad. The Fury **12.05** Tommy: The Good. The Bad. The Fury **12.35** Tommy: The Good. The Bad. The Fury **1.05** Tommy: The Good. The Bad. The Fury **1.35** Drugs Map of Britain **2.05** Drugs Map of Britain **2.35** **3.35** Disclosure

U&Dave

6.0am Teleshopping **7.25** Top Gear **8.20** Border Force: America's Gatekeepers **9.20** Border Force: America's Gatekeepers **10.20** Rick Stein's Cornwall **10.55** Rick Stein's Cornwall **11.20** Yukon Gold **12.20** Top Gear **1.20** Top Gear **2.20** Mortimer & Whitehouse: Gone Fishing **3.0** Man and Beast With Martin Clunes **4.0** Hairy Bikers' Best of British **5.0** Rick Stein's Cornwall **5.30** Rick Stein's Cornwall **6.0** Rick Stein's Cornwall **6.30** Rick Stein's Cornwall **7.0** Mortimer & Whitehouse: Gone Fishing **7.40** Would I Lie to You? The Unseen Bits **8.20** Would I Lie to You? At Christmas **9.0** Have I Got 2021 News for You **10.0** QI XL **11.0** Taskmaster **12.0** Mock the Week **12.40** Would I Lie to You? The Unseen Bits **1.20** Would I Lie to You? At Christmas **2.0** QI XL **3.0** Richard Osman's House of Games **3.30** Parks and Recreation **4.0** Teleshopping

E4

6.0am Hollyoaks **6.55** Rude(ish) Tube Shorts **7.0** Couples Come Dine With Me **8.0** Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA **10.0** America's Funniest Home Videos **11.0** Below Deck: Mediterranean **12.0** The Simpsons **2.0** Brooklyn Nine-Nine **3.0** Modern Family **5.0** The Simpsons **6.30** Hollyoaks **7.30** The Simpsons **8.0** Vanderpump Rules **9.0** Below Deck Down Under **10.0** Gogglebox **11.0** Naked Attraction **12.05** First Dates **1.10** Vanderpump Rules **2.10** Below Deck Down Under **3.0** Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA **3.55** The Simpsons **4.45** The Goldbergs **5.35** Brooklyn Nine-Nine

Film4

11.0am FILM Playing With Fire (2019) **12.55** FILM Steel Magnolias (1989) **3.15** FILM All That Heaven Allows (1955) **5.0** FILM The Enemy Below (1957) **7.05** FILM Dog (2022) **9.0** FILM Angel Has Fallen (2019) **11.20** FILM Peppermint (2018) **1.20** FILM Lucy in the Sky (2019)

PBS America

6.0am Teleshopping **8.0** Weathered: Earth's Extremes **8.35** Digging Up Britain's Past **9.30** Planet of the Plates **10.45** 1066: A Year to Conquer England **11.55** Inside Japan's War **1.0** Weathered: Earth's Extremes **1.35** Digging Up Britain's Past **2.35** Planet of the Plates **3.50** 1066: A Year to Conquer England **5.05** Inside Japan's War **6.10** Digging Up Britain's Past **7.10** Planet of the Plates **8.25** 1066: A Year to Conquer England **9.40** Inside Japan's War **10.50** Planet of the Plates **12.0** 1066: A Year to Conquer England **1.15** Weathered: Earth's Extremes **2.0** Teleshopping

Sky One

6.0am Mornings **6.30** Mornings **7.0** Mornings With Ridge and Frost **7.30** Mornings With Ridge and Frost **8.0** Stargate SG-1 **9.0** NCIS: Los Angeles **10.0** Will & Grace **10.30** Will & Grace **11.0** The Simpsons **11.30** The Simpsons **12.0** Ningaloo: Australia's Ocean Wonder **1.0** Hawaii Five-0 **2.0** Hawaii Five-0 **3.0** S.W.A.T **4.0** S.W.A.T **5.0** The Simpsons **6.0** Animal Control **6.30** Animal Control **7.0** The Simpsons **8.0** Agatha Raisin **9.0** Agatha Raisin **10.0** Last Week Tonight With John Oliver **10.45** Animal Control **11.45** Grimm **12.40** The Force: Manchester **1.30** Road Wars **2.0** Best Medicine **3.0** Hawaii Five-0 **4.0** S.W.A.T **5.0** S.W.A.T

Sky Arts

6.0am Cirque Du Soleil: Corteo **8.0** Artist of the Year: Masterclass **8.30** Artist of the Year: Masterclass **9.0** Tales of the Unexpected **10.0** Alfred Hitchcock Presents **11.0** Discovering: Peter Sellers **12.0** The Art of Film With Ian Nathan **1.0** Tales of the Unexpected **1.30** Tales of the Unexpected **2.0** The Alfred Hitchcock Hour **3.0** The Eighties **4.0** Discovering: Robert Shaw **5.0** Portrait Artist of the Year 2022 **6.0** Tales of the Unexpected **7.0** Alfred Hitchcock Presents **8.0** André Rieu: La Vie Est Belle **9.45** FILM Billy Elliot: The Musical (2014) **12.35** Up Late With Nicola Benedetti **2.10** LSO: Pappano Conducts Ravel, Say & Rachmaninoff **3.50** Sky Arts Ambassador Bursary Shorts **4.0** Sky Arts Book Club **5.0** The Art of Film With Ian Nathan

Steel Magnolias Film4

Sky Atlantic

6.0am Fish Town **8.0** Billions **10.15** House of the Dragon **12.30** Homicide: Life on the Street **1.25** Homicide: Life on the Street **2.15** Billions **3.25** Billions **4.30** The Last of Us **5.50** The Last of Us **6.45** The Penguin **7.45** The Penguin **9.0** House of the Dragon **10.25** Possession **11.25** Possession **12.30** Dune: Prophecy **1.45** Billions **2.55** Billions **4.05** Urban Secrets **5.05** The Guest Wing

Radio

Radio 3

6.30am Breakfast **9.30** Essential Classics **1.0** Classical Live. From the Proms, Adam Hickox conducts the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra and cellist Maximilian Hornung in Shostakovich's Cello Concerto No 1 in E flat major. Plus, from the Granada Early Music festival, Chopin's Fantasy in F minor, Op 49, with pianist Yulianna Avdeeva. **4.0** Composer of the Week: Montgeroult (R) **5.0** In Tune. Katie Derham is in the Hub in Edinburgh to preview the festival. **7.0** BBC Proms 2026. Live from the Royal Albert Hall, London, Esa-Pekka Salonen conducts the combined orchestras of London's Royal Academy of Music and New York's Juilliard School and violinist Vilde Frang in Stravinsky's Symphony in Three Movements, Berg's Violin Concerto and Bartók's Concerto for Orchestra. **10.0** Night Tracks **11.30** 'Round Midnight **12.30** Through the Night

Radio 4

6.0am Today. **9.0** Across the Red Line. The value of university education. (3/3) **9.30** How Did We Get Here?: No World Order. How cooperation between the US and Russia broke down. (3/6) **10.0** Woman's Hour **11.0** Behind the Crime. A woman from Texas whose life was upended after she stole an air conditioner. (2/3) **11.45** Book of the Week Hiroshima, 8.15: The Lost Memoir. By Kiyoshi Tanimoto and Koko Kondo. (1/5) **12.0** News **12.04** You and Yours **12.57** Weather **1.0** The World at One **1.45** **Human Intelligence** The first in a run of episodes about recluses focuses on Emily Brontë. (11/15) **2.0** The Archers (R) **2.15** Alone (R) **2.45** Opening Lines (R) **3.0** Great Lives. Derek Jacobi and Tim Walker reflect on Laurence Olivier. (1/9) **3.30** You're Dead to Me (R) **4.0** Burnham's Pledge (R) **4.30** The Kitchen Cabinet (R) **5.0** PM **5.57** Weather **6.0** News **6.30** Just a Minute (4/6) **7.0** The Archers **7.15** Front Row **8.0** The Briefing Room (R) **8.30** Inside Science (R) **9.0** Across the Red Line (R) **9.30** How Did We Get Here? (R) **9.59** Weather **10.0** The World Tonight **10.45** Book at Bedtime: The Vicar of Wakefield. By Oliver Goldsmith. (6/10) **11.0** Intimacy. Liza's personal life collides with work. (3/4) **11.30** A Good Read (R) **12.0** News **12.30** Book of the Week: Hiroshima, 8.15: The Lost Memoir (R) **12.48** Shipping Forecast **1.0** As World Service **5.0** News **5.04** Burnham's Pledge (R) **5.32** Weather **5.34** Shipping Forecast **5.43** Prayer for the Day **5.45** Farming Today

Radio 4 Extra

6.0am The Waiting Game (5/6) **6.30** The Senior Partner (1/8) **7.0** Control Group Six (4/4) **7.30** Dad's Army (13/20) **8.0** Dr Phil's Bedside Manner (3/4) **8.30** Adrian Mole: The Cappuccino Years (1/10) **8.45** Small Island (11/15) **9.0** Just a Minute (3/6) **9.30** Following the Martian Invasion (1/5) **9.45** Daily Service **10.0** Sounds Natural **10.30** Billy Bunter's Birthday Bash **11.0** The Waiting Game (5/6) **11.30** The Senior Partner (1/8) **12.0** Control Group Six (4/4) **12.30** Dad's Army (13/20) **1.0** Dr Phil's Bedside Manner (3/4) **1.30** Adrian Mole: The Cappuccino Years (1/10) **1.45** Small Island (11/15) **2.0** Wordaholics (4/6) **2.30** A Whole 'Nother Story (4/6) **3.0** Renaissance Man: The Last Judgement of Giorgio Vasari (1/3) **4.0** Sounds Natural **4.30** Billy Bunter's Birthday Bash **5.0** The Waiting Game (5/6) **5.30** The Senior Partner (1/8) **6.0** Control Group Six (4/4) **6.30** Dad's Army (13/20) **7.0** Dr Phil's Bedside Manner (3/4) **7.30** Adrian Mole: The Cappuccino Years (1/10) **7.45** Small Island (11/15) **8.0** Wordaholics (4/6) **8.30** A Whole 'Nother Story (4/6) **9.0** Renaissance Man (1/3) **10.0** Just a Minute (3/6) **10.30** Truly, Madly, Bletchley (1/6) **10.45** Quando, Quando, Quando (1/6) **10.55** The Comedy Club Interview **11.0** Current-ish (3/3) **11.30** The in Crowd (2/5) **12.0** Sounds Natural **12.30** Billy Bunter's Birthday Bash **1.0** The Waiting Game (5/6) **1.30** The Senior Partner (1/8) **2.0** Control Group Six (4/4) **2.30** Dad's Army (13/20) **3.0** Dr Phil's Bedside Manner (3/4) **3.30** Adrian Mole: The Cappuccino Years (1/10) **3.45** Small Island (11/15) **4.0** Wordaholics (4/6) **4.30** A Whole 'Nother Story (4/6) **5.0** Renaissance Man (1/3)

Tuesday

Inside Longleat, Channel 5

BBC One

6.0 **Breakfast** (T) **9.30** Animal Park (T) (R) **10.0** Trace, Track, Get My Car Back (T) (R) **10.30** European Athletics Championships: Birmingham 2026 (T) **1.15** News (T) **1.40** Regional News and Weather (T) **1.50** News (T) **2.0** Money for Nothing (T) **2.45** Escape to the Country (T) (R) **3.30** The Repair Shop (T) (R) **4.30** The Answer Run (T) **5.15** Pointless (T) (R) **6.0** News (T) **6.30** Regional News and Weather (T) **7.0** The One Show (T) **7.30** EastEnders (T)

8.0 **European Athletics Championships: Birmingham 2026** (T) Gabby Logan presents further coverage of the evening session on day two from Alexander Stadium, including the men's 100m final.

10.0 **News** (T)
10.30 **Regional News** (T) Weather
10.40 FILM **The Boys in the Boat** (George Clooney, 2023) (T) A group of rowing underdogs take on elite rivals at the 1936 Berlin Olympics. Fact-based drama, starring Joel Edgerton and Callum Turner.
12.35 **Weather for the Week Ahead** (T) **12.40** News (T)

BBC Two

6.15 **Homes Under the Hammer** (T) (R) **7.15** Money for Nothing (T) (R) **8.0** Sign Zone: The Great British Sewing Bee (T) (R) **9.0** News (T) **10.30** Antiques Road Trip (T) (R) **11.15** Homes Under the Hammer (T) (R) **12.15** Bargain Hunt (T) (R) **1.0** House of Games (T) (R) **1.30** Finish Line (T) (R) **2.15** Do You Know Your Place? (T) (R) **2.45** Country Showdown (T) (R) **3.30** Spy in the Ocean (T) (R) **4.30** Vintage Antiques Roadshow (T) (R) **5.15** Flog It! (T) (R) **6.0** House of Games (T) (R) **6.30** Wild Reckoning (T) (R)

7.0 **European Athletics Championships: Birmingham 2026** (T) The men's hammer and women's 5000m.
8.0 **The Great British Sewing Bee** (T) The sewers tackle the wide world of sport.
9.0 **Bloody Mary: Lucy Worsley Investigates** (T) (R) Was Queen Mary a pioneer or a tyrant? Last in the series.

10.0 **Live at the Apollo** (T) (R) Emmanuel Sonubi hosts.
10.30 **Newsnight** (T) Weather
11.05 **The Vampire Lestat: Interview With the Vampire** (T) Daniel's probing triggers a troubled Lestat.
11.55 **The Vampire Lestat: Interview With the Vampire** (T) Louis worries his waiter.
12.45 **Sign Zone** Uncanny (T) (R)

ITV1

6.0 **Good Morning Britain** (T) **10.0** This Morning (T) **1.30** News and Weather (T) **1.55** Local News and Weather (T) **2.0** Dickinson's Real Deal (T) (R) **3.0** Deal Or No Deal (T) (R) **4.0** Tipping Point (T) (R) **5.0** The Chase (T) (R) **6.0** Local News and Weather (T) **6.30** News and Weather (T) **7.30** Inside the Langham: Britain's First Grand Hotel (T)

8.0 **Emmerdale** (T) Caleb is feeling frustrated, while Billy and Dawn plan their escape and Jacob is shocked.
8.30 **Coronation Street** (T) Tim and Sally reel from the news of Richie's murder charge.
9.0 **Cold Case Forensics: In the Blood** (T) Including the case of 10-year-old Damilola Taylor. Last in the series.

10.0 **News** (T) Weather
10.30 **Local News** (T) Weather
10.45 FILM **The Spy Who Loved Me** (Lewis Gilbert, 1977) (T) James Bond thriller, starring Roger Moore and Barbara Bach.
12.55 **Shop on TV 3.0** The Summit (T) (R) **3.50** Unwind With ITV (T) **5.05** Long Lost Family: Born Without Trace (T) (R)

Channel 4

6.30 **The King of Queens** (T) (R) **7.45** Everybody Loves Raymond (T) (R) **9.10** Frasier (T) (R) **11.10** Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA (T) (R) **12.05** News (T) **12.10** Find It, Fix It, Flog It (T) (R) **1.10** The Great House Giveaway (T) (R) **2.10** Countdown (T) **3.0** A Place in the Sun (T) (R) **4.0** Saving Country Houses With Penelope Keith (T) (R) **5.0** Chateau DIY (T) (R) **6.0** American Pickers (T) (R) **7.0** News (T)

8.0 **Dover 24/7: Britain's Busiest Port** (T) Border Force agents uncover suspicious packages and staff hold a remembrance service. Last in the series.
9.0 **Celebrity Hunted** (T) At a country hotel, two of the contestants are surrounded, while two others brave exposure at a hospital.

10.0 **Gogglebox** (T) (R)
11.05 **Secret Lives of Gypsy Wives** (T) (R)
12.05 **Naked Attraction** (T) (R) **1.0** Ramsay's Hotel Hell (T) (R) **1.50** Levison Wood: Walking With Orangutans (T) (R) **2.45** FILM The Kid Detective (2020) (T) **4.25** A Place in the Sun (T) (R) **4.55** The Piano (T) (R) **5.50** Countdown (T) (R)

Channel 5

6.0 **Milkshake! 9.15** Jeremy Vine (T) **11.30** Storm & Alexis (T) **12.45** News (T) **12.50** Matt Allwright (T) **2.20** FILM Danger Rocks the Cradle (Roxanne Boisvert, 2022) (T) **4.0** Castle (T) (R) **4.55** Love Nature (T) (R) **5.0** News (T) **6.0** Corfu: Jewel of the Med (T) (R) **6.55** News (T) **7.0** The Yorkshire Vet: At Home With the Greens (T) (R) **7.55** News (T)

8.0 **Inside Longleat** (T) Cameras follow a bat conservation team, and Lady Bath and keeper Ian talk about Longleat's giraffes.
9.0 **The Romans With Rob Rinder and Ruth Goodman** (T) Rob and Ruth delve into 122 AD, when the Emperor Hadrian made a dramatic visit to Roman Britain.

10.30 **The Bomb on the Boat: The Murder of Lord Mountbatten** (T) (R) Documentary.
12.05 **Serial Killer Wives** (T) (R) **1.0** Cruise TV (T) (R) **2.0** GPs: Behind Closed Doors (T) (R) **2.50** Castle (T) (R) **3.40** Friends (T) (R) **4.30** Yorkshire With Jane McDonald (T) (R) **5.25** Entertainment News (T) **5.35** Paw Patrol (T) (R)

BBC Four

7.0 **The Architecture the Railways Built** (T) (R) The Ffestiniog railway. **7.40** The Flying Gardener (T) (R) From Dumfries and Galloway. **7.55** To the Manor Born (T) (R) Audrey leaves Grantleigh Manor.

8.30 **Keeping Up Appearances** (T) (R) Hyacinth once again tries to rescue Richard from social obscurity with a plan to turn him into an executive – but he proves far from enthusiastic.
9.0 **Ardal O'Hanlon: Tomb Raider** (T) (R) The comic actor explores some of the most important archaeological finds in Ireland's history.

10.0 **Kamikaze: An Untold History** (T) (R) Veterans reflect on the impact of the second world war suicide missions.
11.30 **The Sky at Night** (T) (R)
12.0 **Horizon: The Wildest Weather in the Universe** (T) (R) **1.0** Beautiful Equations (T) (R) **2.0** The Flying Gardener (T) (R) **2.15** Ardal O'Hanlon: Tomb Raider (T) (R)

Other channels

BBC Three

7.0pm The Catch Up **7.05** Spud **7.25** FILM Lara Croft: Tomb Raider (2001) **9.0** **RuPaul's Drag Race UK: Meet the Queens** **9.20** FILM Bridget Jones's Diary (2001) **10.55** FILM Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason (2004) **12.35** Matthew Perry and the Ketamine Queen **1.35** Stacey Dooley: Ready for War? **2.35** My Mate's a Bad Date **2.55** Stacey Dooley: Blood, Sweat and T-Shirts

U&Dave

6.0am Teleshopping **7.25** Top Gear **8.20** Border Force: America's Gatekeepers **9.20** Border Force: America's Gatekeepers **10.20** Rick Stein's Cornwall **10.50** Rick Stein's Cornwall **11.20** Yukon Gold **12.15** Top Gear **1.15** Top Gear **2.20** Mortimer & Whitehouse: Gone Fishing **3.0** Man and Beast With Martin Clunes **4.0** Hairy Bikers' Best of British **5.0** Rick Stein's Cornwall **5.30** Rick Stein's Cornwall **6.0** Rick Stein's Cornwall **6.30** Rick Stein's Cornwall **7.0** Mortimer & Whitehouse: Gone Fishing **7.40** Would I Lie to You? **8.20** Would I Lie to You? **9.0** Have I Got a Bit More News for You **10.0** QI XL **11.0** Taskmaster **12.0** Mock the Week **12.40** Would I Lie to You? **2.0** QI XL **3.05** Richard Osman's House of Games **3.35** Parks and Recreation **4.0** Teleshopping

E4

6.0am Hollyoaks **6.30** Hollyoaks **6.55** Rude(ish) Tube Shorts **7.0** Couples Come Dine With Me **8.0** Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA **9.0** Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA **10.0** America's Funniest Home Videos **11.0** Below Deck: Mediterranean **12.0** The Simpsons **2.0** Brooklyn Nine-Nine **3.0** Modern Family **5.0** The Simpsons **6.30** Hollyoaks **7.30** The Simpsons **8.0** Vanderpump Rules **9.0** Below Deck Down Under **10.0** First Dates: Valentine's **11.05** Gogglebox **1.10** Vanderpump Rules **2.10** Below Deck Down Under **3.0** Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA **3.50** The Simpsons **4.15** The Goldbergs **5.05** Brooklyn Nine-Nine **5.30** Brooklyn Nine-Nine

Film4

11.0am FILM Man in the Saddle (1951) **12.45** FILM The Black Swan (1942) **2.30** FILM Fantastic Voyage (1966) **4.35** FILM The Kid Who Would Be King (2019) **7.05** FILM See How They Run (2022) **9.0** FILM **Missing** (2023) **11.15** FILM Jennifer's Body (2009) **1.20** FILM Plan B (2021)

PBS America

6.0am Teleshopping **8.0** Weathered: Earth's Extremes **8.35** Digging Up Britain's Past **9.35** Eclipse Across Europe **10.40** 1066: A Year to Conquer England **11.55** Inside Japan's War **1.0** Weathered: Earth's Extremes **1.35** Digging Up Britain's Past **2.35** Eclipse Across Europe **3.50** 1066: A Year to Conquer England **5.05** Inside Japan's War **6.15** Digging Up Britain's Past **7.15** Eclipse Across Europe **8.25** 1066: A Year to Conquer England **9.40** Inside Japan's War **10.50** Eclipse Across Europe **12.0** 1066: A Year to Conquer England **1.15** Weathered: Earth's Extremes **2.0** Teleshopping

Sky One

6.0am Mornings **6.30** Mornings With Ridge and Frost **7.30** Mornings With Ridge and Frost **8.0** Stargate SG-1 **10.0** Will & Grace **10.30** Will & Grace **11.0** The Simpsons **11.30** The Simpsons **12.0** Ningaloo: Australia's Ocean Wonder **1.0** Hawaii Five-0 **3.0** S.W.A.T **5.0** The Simpsons **5.30** The Simpsons **6.0** Animal Control **7.0** The Simpsons **8.0** Best Medicine **9.0** Never Mind the Buzzcocks **10.0** The 'Burbs **11.0** Animal Control **12.0** Grimm **1.0** The Force: Manchester **2.0** Road Wars **3.0** Hawaii Five-0 **4.0** S.W.A.T **5.0** S.W.A.T

Sky Arts

6.0am A Swan Lake **7.55** Artist of the Year: Masterclass **8.55** Tales of the Unexpected **9.55** Alfred Hitchcock Presents **11.0** Discovering: Robert Shaw **12.0** The Art of Film With Ian Nathan **1.0** Tales of the Unexpected **2.0** The Alfred Hitchcock Hour **3.0** The Eighties **4.0** Discovering: Rex Harrison **5.0** Portrait Artist of the Year 2022 **6.0** Tales of the Unexpected **7.0** Alfred Hitchcock Presents **8.0** The World in a Painting: Ingres' Diamond **9.15** Art Traffickers: Treasures Stolen from the Tombs **10.15** Wonderland: Gothic **11.15** The Movies **12.15** Peter O'Toole: Along the Sky Road to Aqaba **2.15** The V&A Presents Alice: Curiouser and Curiouser **4.05** Sky Arts Book Club **5.0** The Art of Film With Ian Nathan

Plan B, Film4

Sky Atlantic

6.0am Fish Town **8.0** Billions **9.05** Billions **10.15** House of the Dragon **11.25** House of the Dragon **12.35** Homicide: Life on the Street **1.35** Homicide: Life on the Street **2.30** Billions **3.35** Billions **4.40** The Last of Us **5.45** The Last of Us **6.50** House of the Dragon **8.0** House of the Dragon **9.0** Gomorrah: The Origins **10.0** Gomorrah: The Origins **11.0** House of the Dragon **12.15** House of the Dragon **1.30** Billions **2.35** Billions **3.45** The Guest Wing **4.35** Sort Of **5.05** The Guest Wing

Radio

Radio 3

6.30am Breakfast **9.30** Essential Classics **1.0** Classical Live. From the Proms, the National Youth Orchestra play Berlioz's Symphonie Fantastique. **4.0** Composer of the Week: Montgeroult (R) **5.0** In Tune **6.0** BBC Proms 2026. Live from the Royal Albert Hall, Gustavo Dudamel conducts the LA Philharmonic in Beethoven's Symphony No 6 in F and Adès's Dante: Part 1 - Inferno. **8.15** BBC Proms 2026. At the Glasshouse in Gateshead, Feldman's Crippled Symmetry, played by Helena Gourd (flute/bass flute), Jude Carlton (vibraphone/glockenspiel) and Dinis Sousa (piano/celesta). **10.15** BBC Proms 2026. Live from the Royal Albert Hall, Tom Fetherstonhaugh conducts the Fantasia Orchestra, BBC Singers and percussionist Evelyn Glennie in works by John Coltrane, Ellington, Héloïse Werner, Vincent Ho, Feldman, Caroline Shaw, Dvořák, Vaughan Williams, Evelyn Glennie and Philip Sheppard, Radiohead and Meredith Monk. **11.45** 'Round Midnight **12.30** Through the Night

Radio 4

6.0am Today **9.0** Invisible Hands. David Dimbleby tells the story of the CIA. (3/6) **9.30** Inside Health (6/6) **10.0** Woman's Hour **11.0** Screenshot (R) **11.45** Book of the Week Hiroshima, 8.15: The Lost Memoir (2/5) **12.0** News **12.04** Call You and Yours **12.57** Weather **1.0** The World at On **1.45** Human Intelligence. The work of philosopher Ibn Khaldun. (12/15) **2.0** The Archers (R) **2.15** Clair. Fantasy crime drama, by Philip Palmer, with Hannah Daniel. **3.0** Lady on Trial With Lucy Worsley. Two sisters transported to Australia for receiving stolen ribbons. (9/10) **3.30** Heart and Soul (R) **4.0** Above and Below. The threat from climate change to the ancient creative past. **4.30** What's Up Docs? Why some people find it so difficult to relax. **5.0** PM **5.57** Weather **6.0** News **6.30** Paul Sinha's Perfect Pub Quiz (1/6) **7.0** The Archers **7.15** Front Row **8.0** After EncroChat. Danny Shaw investigates whether the EncroChat operation reduced the supply of drugs. **8.40** In Touch **9.0** Crossing Continents. Efforts to protect Victoria Falls. (2/9) **9.30** Scam Secrets (R) **9.59** Weather **10.0** The World Tonight **10.45** Book at Bedtime: The Vicar of Wakefield (7/10) **11.0** Wild Inside (R) **11.30** A Good Read (R) **12.0** News **12.30** Book of the Week (R) **12.48** Shipping Forecast **1.0** As World Service **5.0** News **5.04** Inside Science (R) **5.32** Weather **5.34** Shipping Forecast **5.43** Prayer for the Day **5.45** Farming Today

Radio 4 Extra

6.0am The Waiting Game (6/6) **6.30** The Senior Partner (2/8) **7.0** Yes Minister (5/8) **7.30** The Milligan Papers (1/6) **8.0** Whatever Happened to Baby Jane Austen? (1/5) **8.30** Adrian Mole: The Cappuccino Years (2/10) **8.45** Small Island (12/15) **9.0** Meet David Sedaris (6/6) **9.30** Following the Martian Invasion (2/5) **9.45** Daily Service **10.0** A Good Read (7/9) **10.30** The Things We Forgot to Remember (2/4) **11.0** The Waiting Game (6/6) **11.30** The Senior Partner (2/8) **12.0** Yes Minister (5/8) **12.30** The Milligan Papers (1/6) **1.0** Whatever Happened to Baby Jane Austen? (1/5) **1.30** Adrian Mole: The Cappuccino Years (2/10) **1.45** Small Island (12/15) **2.0** Hoax! **2.30** Life in London (1/6) **3.0** Renaissance Man: The Last Judgement of Giorgio Vasari (2/3) **4.0** A Good Read (7/9) **4.30** The Things We Forgot to Remember (2/4) **5.0** The Waiting Game (6/6) **5.30** The Senior Partner (2/8) **6.0** Yes Minister (5/8) **6.30** The Milligan Papers (1/6) **7.0** Whatever Happened to Baby Jane Austen? (1/5) **7.30** Adrian Mole: The Cappuccino Years (2/10) **7.45** Small Island (12/15) **8.0** Hoax! **8.30** Life in London (1/6) **9.0** Renaissance Man (2/3) **10.0** Meet David Sedaris (6/6) **10.30** And the Winner Is (6/6) **11.0** All the World's a Globe (6/8) **11.15** Foley and McColl: The Interview (6/6) **11.30** Chain Reaction (2/6) **12.0** A Good Read (7/9) **12.30** The Things We Forgot to Remember (2/4) **1.0** The Waiting Game (6/6) **1.30** The Senior Partner (2/8) **2.0** Yes Minister (5/8) **2.30** The Milligan Papers (1/6) **3.0** Whatever Happened to Baby Jane Austen? (1/5) **3.30** Adrian Mole (2/10) **3.45** Small Island (12/15) **4.0** Hoax! **4.30** Life in London (1/6) **5.0** Renaissance Man (2/3)

Wednesday

Murder Trial, BBC Two

BBC One

6.0 **Breakfast** (T) **9.30** Animal Park (T) (R) **10.0** Trace, Track, Get My Car Back (T) (R) **10.30** European Athletics Championships: Birmingham 2026 (T) **1.15** News (T) **1.40** Regional News and Weather (T) **1.50** News (T) **2.0** Money for Nothing (T) **2.45** Escape to the Country (T) (R) **3.30** The Repair Shop (T) (R) **4.30** The Answer Run (T) **5.15** Pointless (T) (R) **6.0** News (T) **6.30** Regional News and Weather (T) **7.0** The One Show (T) **7.30** EastEnders (T)

8.0 **European Athletics Championships: Birmingham 2026** (T) Gabby Logan presents further coverage of the evening session on day three from Alexander Stadium, including the finals of the men's 400m and women's 400m hurdles.

10.0 **News** (T)
10.30 **Regional News** (T) Weather
10.40 **MOTD: Uefa Super Cup Highlights** (T) Paris Saint-Germain v Aston Villa.
11.10 FILM **Red Eye** (2005) (T) Thriller, starring Rachel McAdams and Cillian Murphy.
12.25 **The Hit List Celebrity Special** (T) (R) **1.10** Weather for the Week Ahead (T) **1.15** News (T)

BBC Two

6.15 **Homes Under the Hammer** (T) (R) **7.15** Money for Nothing (T) (R) **8.0** Sign Zone: Great Japanese Railway Journeys (T) (R) **9.0** News (T) **10.30** Antiques Road Trip (T) (R) **11.15** Homes Under the Hammer (T) (R) **12.15** Bargain Hunt (T) (R) **1.0** House of Games (T) (R) **1.30** The Finish Line (T) (R) **2.15** Do You Know Your Place? (T) (R) **2.45** Country Showdown (T) (R) **3.30** Spy in the Ocean (T) (R) **4.30** Antiques Roadshow (T) (R) **5.15** Flog It! (T) (R) **6.0** House of Games (T) (R) **6.30** Wild Reckoning (T) (R)

7.0 **European Athletics Championships: Birmingham 2026** (T) Including the men's 110m hurdles semi-finals.
8.0 **The Repair Shop** (T) (R) Experts restore a photo of President Kennedy's kids.
9.0 **Murder Trial** (T) Part one of two. A gamekeeper is accused of murdering a former colleague.

10.0 **Inside No 9** (T) (R) Shane and Clifford plan to abduct the wife of a hedge fund manager.
10.30 **Newsnight** (T) Weather
11.05 **Evolution** (T) (R)
12.05 FILM **Kindling** (Connor O'Hara, 2023) (T) Coming-of-age drama. **1.35** Sign Zone: Amityville – An Origin Story (T) (R)

ITV1

6.0 **Good Morning Britain** (T) **10.0** This Morning (T) **1.30** News and Weather (T) **1.55** Local News and Weather (T) **2.0** Dickinson's Real Deal (T) (R) **3.0** Deal Or No Deal (T) (R) **4.0** Tipping Point (T) (R) **5.0** The Chase (T) (R) **6.0** Local News and Weather (T) **6.30** News and Weather (T) **7.0** Live Pre-Season Football (T) Manchester United v Leeds United (kick-off 7.30pm).

9.50 **It'll Be Alright on the Night** (T) Tom Allen introduces more TV clangers, featuring Joel Dommett, Romesh Ranganathan, Ant & Dec, Colin Murray, Amol Rajan, Susanna Reid, Joe Pasquale, Prue Leith and more.

10.20 **News** (T) Weather
10.50 **Local News** (T) Weather
11.05 **Long Lost Family: Born Without Trace** (T) (R)
12.05 **Shop on TV 3.0** Love & Death (T) (R) **3.55** Inside the Langham: Britain's First Grand Hotel (T) (R) **4.20** Unwind With ITV (T) **5.35** Tom Kerridge Cooks Italy (T) (R)

Channel 4

6.30 **The King of Queens** (T) (R) **7.45** Everybody Loves Raymond (T) (R) **9.10** Frasier (T) (R) **10.40** Frasier (T) (R) **11.10** Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA (T) (R) **12.05** News (T) **12.10** Find It, Fix It, Flog It (T) (R) **1.10** The Great House Giveaway (T) (R) **2.10** Countdown (T) **3.0** A Place in the Sun (T) (R) **4.0** Saving Country Houses With Penelope Keith (T) (R) **5.0** Chateau DIY (T) (R) **6.0** American Pickers (T) (R) **7.0** News (T)

8.0 **Extraordinary Extensions** (T) A couple start to renovate a Canterbury B&B, only to find a wartime bomb shelter in the garden.
9.0 **Spy Next Door: The Anna Chapman Story** (T) The story of a British businesswoman and model unmasked by the FBI in 2010 as part of a Russian spy ring.

10.0 **24 Hours in A&E** (T) (R)
11.05 **999: On the Front Line** (T) (R)
12.10 **Celebrity Hunted** (T) (R) **1.05** Celebrity Hunted (T) (R) **2.0** Ramsay's Hotel Hell (T) (R) **2.50** Dover 24/7: Britain's Busiest Port (T) (R) **3.45** Fur Babies (T) (R) **4.40** Kirstie's House of Craft (T) (R) **4.55** Couples Come Dine With Me (T) (R) **5.50** Countdown (R)

Channel 5

6.0 **Milkshake! 9.15** Jeremy Vine (T) **11.30** Storm & Alexis (T) **12.45** News (T) **12.50** Matt Allwright (T) **2.20** FILM Deadly Secrets (Jessica Harmon, 2023) (T) **4.0** Castle (T) (R) **4.55** Love Nature (T) (R) **5.0** News (T) **6.0** Sicily: Jewel of the Med (T) (R) **6.55** News (T) **7.0** Car Pound Cops (T) (R) **7.55** News (T)

8.0 **Casualty 24/7: Every Second Counts** (T) New series. An 82-year-old woman is brought to Barnsley Casualty after suffering a fall.
9.0 **999: Critical Condition** (T) A woman fights for her life after an unexplained collapse, and an 82-year-old man's life is at risk due to pneumonia.

10.0 **Ambulance: Code Red** (T) (R)
11.05 **Cause of Death** (T) (R)
12.05 **A&E After Dark** (T) (R) **1.0** Cruise TV (T) (R) **2.0** GPs: Behind Closed Doors (T) (R) **2.50** Castle (T) (R) **3.40** Friends (T) (R) **4.35** Cruising With Susan Calman (T) (R) **5.25** Entertainment News (T) **5.35** Paw Patrol (T) (R) **5.50** Paddington (T) (R)

BBC Four

7.0 **Villages By the Sea** (T) (R) A look at Culross in Fife. **7.30** Wainwright Walks (T) (R) A climb of Castle Crag in Cumbria.

8.0 **The Treasures of Ancient Rome** (T) (R) Alastair Sooke charts the decline and fall of the Roman empire through some of its artworks. Last in the series.
9.0 **Mary Beard's Ultimate Rome: Empire Without Limit** (T) (R) The academic explores the physical world of the Roman empire.

10.0 **I, Claudius** (T) (R) Piso and his wife are charged with Germanicus's murder.
10.50 **I, Claudius** (T) (R)
11.45 **The Treasures of Ancient Rome** (T) (R)
12.45 **Inside the Bat Cave** (T) (R) **1.45** Wainwright Walks (T) (R) **2.15** Villages By the Sea (T) (R) **2.45** Mary Beard's Ultimate Rome (T) (R)

Other channels

BBC Three

7.0pm The Catch Up **7.05** Deadly 60 **7.30** Deadly 60 **8.0** Top Gear **9.0** Top Gear **10.0** **Guy Montgomery's Guy Mont-Spelling Bee** **10.50** Guy Montgomery's Guy Mont-Spelling Bee **11.35** This Country **12.0** This Country **12.25** This Country **12.45** This Country **1.10** This Country **1.35** This Country **2.0** Dinosaur **2.55** Dinosaur **3.25** My Mate's a Bad Date

U&Dave

6.0am Teleshopping **7.25** Top Gear **8.20** Border Force: America's Gatekeepers **9.20** Border Force: America's Gatekeepers **10.20** Rick Stein's Cornwall **10.50** Rick Stein's Cornwall **11.20** Yukon Gold **12.15** Top Gear **1.20** Top Gear **2.20** Mortimer & Whitehouse: Gone Fishing **3.0** Guy Martin: Proper Jobs **4.0** Hairy Bikers' Best of British **5.0** Rick Stein's Cornwall **5.30** Rick Stein's Cornwall **6.0** Rick Stein's Cornwall **6.30** Rick Stein's Cornwall **7.0** Mortimer & Whitehouse: Gone Fishing **7.40** Would I Lie to You? **8.20** Would I Lie to You? **9.0** QI XL **10.0** Have I Got a Bit More News for You **11.0** Taskmaster **12.0** Mock the Week **12.40** Would I Lie to You? **1.20** Would I Lie to You? **2.0** QI XL **3.05** Richard Osman's House of Games **3.35** Parks and Recreation **4.0** Teleshopping

E4

6.0am Hollyoaks **6.55** Rude(ish) Tube Shorts **7.0** Couples Come Dine With Me **8.0** Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA **10.0** America's Funniest Home Videos **11.0** Below Deck: Mediterranean **12.0** The Simpsons **2.0** Brooklyn Nine-Nine **3.0** Modern Family **5.0** The Simpsons **5.30** The Simpsons **6.0** The Simpsons **6.30** Hollyoaks **7.0** Hollyoaks **7.30** The Simpsons **8.0** Vanderpump Rules **9.0** Gogglebox **10.0** Gogglebox **11.0** Naked Attraction **12.0** First Dates **1.05** Gogglebox **2.10** Vanderpump Rules **3.0** Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA **3.50** The Simpsons **4.15** The Goldbergs **4.40** The Goldbergs **5.05** Brooklyn Nine-Nine

Film4

11.0am FILM Secret Headquarters (2022) **1.05** FILM Sign of the Pagan (1954) **2.55** FILM The Comancheros (1961) **5.05** FILM They Rode West (1954) **6.50** FILM Fisherman's Friends: One and All (2022) **9.0** FILM Mission: Impossible – Rogue Nation (2015) **11.40** FILM The Rhythm Section (2020) **1.50** FILM Holy Cow (2024)

PBS America

6.0am Teleshopping **8.0** Weathered: Earth's Extremes **8.35** Digging Up Britain's Past **9.35** **Athens: Birth of Democracy** **10.40** 1066: A Year to Conquer England **11.55** Inside Japan's War **1.0** Weathered: Earth's Extremes **1.35** Digging Up Britain's Past **2.35** Athens: Birth of Democracy **3.50** 1066: A Year to Conquer England **5.05** Inside Japan's War **6.10** Digging Up Britain's Past **7.15** Athens: Birth of Democracy **8.25** 1066: A Year to Conquer England **9.40** Inside Japan's War **10.50** Athens: Birth of Democracy **12.0** 1066: A Year to Conquer England **1.15** Weathered: Earth's Extremes **2.0** Teleshopping

Sky One

6.0am Mornings **6.30** Mornings **7.0** Mornings With Ridge and Frost **8.0** Stargate SG-1 **10.0** Will & Grace **11.0** The Simpsons **12.0** Ningaloo: Australia's Ocean Wonder **1.0** Hawaii Five-0 **2.0** Hawaii Five-0 **3.0** S.W.A.T **4.0** S.W.A.T **5.0** The Simpsons **6.0** Animal Control **7.0** The Simpsons **7.30** The Simpsons **8.0** A League of Their Own: The Rally **9.0** FILM Lethal Weapon (1987) **11.0** Animal Control **12.0** Grimm **1.0** The Force: Manchester **2.0** Road Wars **3.0** Hawaii Five-0 **4.0** S.W.A.T **5.0** S.W.A.T

Sky Arts

6.0am Classic FM Live at the Movies **8.0** Artist of the Year: Masterclass **8.30** Artist of the Year: Masterclass **9.0** Tales of the Unexpected **10.0** Alfred Hitchcock Presents **10.30** Alfred Hitchcock Presents

Holy Cow, Film4

11.0 Discovering: Rex Harrison **12.0** The Art of Film With Ian Nathan **1.0** Tales of the Unexpected **1.30** Tales of the Unexpected **2.0** The Alfred Hitchcock Hour **3.0** The Eighties **4.0** Discovering: Yul Brynner **5.0** Portrait Artist of the Year 2022 **6.0** Tales of the Unexpected **6.30** Tales of the Unexpected **7.0** Alfred Hitchcock Presents **7.30** Alfred Hitchcock Presents **8.0** Voices of the Valleys **9.0** Battle of the Irish Dancers **10.0** The Eighties **11.0** The Art of Architecture **12.0** The Pilgrimage of Gilbert & George **2.0** Statues Redressed **4.0** Skinner & Mina's Literary Road Trip: Pope & Swift **5.0** The Art of Film With Ian Nathan

Sky Atlantic

6.0am Fish Town **8.0** Billions **10.15** House of the Dragon **12.35** Homicide: Life on the Street **2.30** Billions **3.35** Billions **4.40** The Last of Us **6.35** House of the Dragon **7.45** House of the Dragon **9.0** House of the Dragon **10.25** Station Eleven **11.25** Station Eleven **12.25** House of the Dragon **2.45** Billions **3.55** Billions **5.05** The Guest Wing

Radio

Radio 3

6.30am Breakfast **9.30** Essential Classics **1.0** Classical Live. From the Proms, Esa-Pekka Salonen conducts the Juilliard Orchestra and Royal Academy of Music Symphony Orchestra in Stravinsky's Symphony in Three Movements. Plus, from the Granada festival, Chopin's Two Nocturnes, Op 62, with pianist Yulianna Avdeeva. **3.0** Choral Evensong. A service at Chichester Cathedral. **4.0** Composer of the Week: Montgeroult (R) **5.0** In Tune **7.0** BBC Proms 2026. Live from the Royal Albert Hall, London, Gustavo Dudamel conducts the Los Angeles Philharmonic and Los Angeles Master Chorale in Beethoven's Symphony No 7 in A and Gabriela Ortiz's Revolución Diamantina. **10.0** Night Tracks **11.30** 'Round Midnight **12.30** Through the Night

Radio 4

6.0am Today **9.0** Sideways (5/8) **9.30** Breakin' the Cycle. Colin and D decide to shut down their drug empire. (3/6) **10.0** Woman's Hour **11.0** After EncroChat (R) **11.40** This Week in History **11.45** Book of the Week: Hiroshima, 8.15: The Lost Memoir. By Kiyoshi Tanimoto and Koko Kondo. (3/5) **12.0** News **12.04** You and Yours **12.57** Weather **1.0** The World at One **1.45** Human Intelligence. The work of French philosopher Michel de Montaigne. (13/15) **2.0** The Archers (R) **2.15** United Kingdoms. Short dramas about survival: New Brighton by Jeff Young; Carrick-a-Rede by Claire Sullivan; Newport by Darragh Mortell; Skye by Iain Finlay MacLeod; and Cambourne by Rebecca Morden. (R) **3.0** James Hutton and the Restless Earth (R) **3.30** Air Eaters. How a microbe pulled from an Arctic dump could help our fight against the climate crisis. **4.0** The Power of Guilt (R) **4.15** The Media Show **5.0** PM **5.57** Weather **6.0** News **6.30** Best Medicine. Horse therapy, breaking bad news and finding a diagnosis on Instagram. (3/6) **7.0** The Archers **7.15** Front Row **8.0** AntiSocial (R) **8.45** Café Hope (R) **9.0** Invisible Hands (R) **9.30** Inside Health (R) **9.59** Weather **10.0** The World Tonight **10.45** Book at Bedtime: The Vicar of Wakefield. By Oliver Goldsmith. (8/10) **11.0** Sunil Patel: An Idiot's Guide to Living Forever. Having failed to become immortal, The comedian ponders where to go from here. (6/6) **11.15** Follow the Rabbit (R) **11.30** A Good Read (R) **12.0** News **12.30** Book of the Week: Hiroshima, 8.15: The Lost Memoir (R) **12.48** Shipping Forecast **1.0** As World Service **5.0** News **5.04** Sideways (R) **5.34** Shipping Forecast **5.43** Prayer for the Day **5.45** Farming Today

Radio 4 Extra

6.0am The Wolf Far Hence (1/6) **6.30** The Senior Partner (3/8) **7.0** After Henry (7/8) **7.30** Hancock's Half Hour (9/12) **8.0** Bridget Christie: Mortal (4/4) **8.30** Adrian Mole: The Cappuccino Years (3/10) **8.45** Small Island (13/15) **9.0** Best Medicine (2/6) **9.30** Following the Martian Invasion (3/5) **9.45** Daily Service **10.0** The Greenham Effect **11.0** The Wolf Far Hence (1/6) **11.30** The Senior Partner (3/8) **12.0** After Henry (7/8) **12.30** Hancock's Half Hour (9/12) **1.0** Bridget Christie: Mortal (4/4) **1.30** Adrian Mole: The Cappuccino Years (3/10) **1.45** Small Island (13/15) **2.0** The Ultimate Choice (2/6) **2.30** Getting Nowhere Fast (2/6) **3.0** Renaissance Man: The Last Judgement of Giorgio Vasari (3/3) **4.0** The Greenham Effect **5.0** The Wolf Far Hence (1/6) **5.30** The Senior Partner (3/8) **6.0** After Henry (7/8) **6.30** Hancock's Half Hour (9/12) **7.0** Bridget Christie: Mortal (4/4) **7.30** Adrian Mole: The Cappuccino Years (3/10) **7.45** Small Island (13/15) **8.0** The Ultimate Choice (2/6) **8.30** Getting Nowhere Fast (2/6) **9.0** Renaissance Man: The Last Judgement of Giorgio Vasari (3/3) **10.0** Best Medicine (2/6) **10.30** Mitch Benn's Crimes Against Music (3/4) **11.0** Welcome to Wherever You Are (1/4) **11.30** Dial M for Pizza (5/6) **12.0** The Greenham Effect **1.0** The Wolf Far Hence (1/6) **1.30** The Senior Partner (3/8) **2.0** After Henry (7/8) **2.30** Hancock's Half Hour (9/12) **3.0** Bridget Christie: Mortal (4/4) **3.30** Adrian Mole: The Cappuccino Years (3/10) **3.45** Small Island (13/15) **4.0** The Ultimate Choice (2/6) **4.30** Getting Nowhere Fast (2/6) **5.0** Renaissance Man (3/3)

Thursday

The Big Deal With Steph McGovern, BBC Two

BBC One

6.0 **Breakfast** (T) **9.30** Animal Park (T) (R) **10.0** Trace, Track, Get My Car Back (T) (R) **10.30** European Athletics Championships: Birmingham 2026 (T) **1.15** News (T) **1.40** Regional News and Weather (T) **1.50** News (T) **2.0** Money for Nothing (T) **2.45** Escape to the Country (T) (R) **3.30** The Repair Shop (T) (R) **4.30** The Answer Run (T) **5.15** Pointless (T) (R) **6.0** News (T) **6.30** Regional News and Weather (T) **7.0** The One Show (T) **7.30** EastEnders (T)

8.0 **European Athletics Championships: Birmingham 2026** (T) Gabby Logan presents further coverage of the evening session on day four from Alexander Stadium, including the women's 200m final.

10.0 **News** (T)
10.30 **Regional News** (T) Weather
10.40 FILM **Yesterday** (Danny Boyle, 2019) (T) A musician wakes up to find he is the only person in the world who remembers the Beatles. Comedy, with Himesh Patel.
12.30 **Alan Carr's Picture Slam** (T) (R) **1.15** Weather for the Week Ahead (T) **1.20** News (T)

BBC Two

6.30 **The Bidding Room** (T) (R) **7.15** Money for Nothing (T) (R) **8.0** Sign Zone: Gardeners' World (T) (R) **9.0** News (T) **10.30** Antiques Road Trip (T) (R) **11.15** Homes Under the Hammer (T) (R) **12.15** Bargain Hunt (T) (R) **1.0** House of Games (T) (R) **1.30** The Finish Line (T) (R) **2.15** Do You Know Your Place? (T) (R) **2.45** The Great Rift: Africa's Wild Heart (T) (R) **3.35** Spy in the Ocean (T) (R) **4.35** Vintage Antiques Roadshow (T) (R) **5.15** Flog It! (T) (R) **6.0** House of Games (T) (R) **6.30** Wild Reckoning (T) (R)

7.0 **European Athletics Championships: Birmingham 2026** (T) Day four.
8.0 **The Big Deal With Steph McGovern** (T) New series. Seven pairs of aspiring art dealers compete.
9.0 **A House Through Time** (T) New series. David Olusoga charts the inhabitants of a house in Edinburgh.

10.0 **Red Dwarf** (T) (R) Rimmer strives to earn a commission.
10.30 **Newsnight** (T) Weather
11.05 **Murder Trial** (T) (R) Part one of two. In 2024, Brian Low is found dead in rural Scotland.
12.05 **The Devil in the Family: The Fall of Ruby Franke** (T) (R) **12.55** Sign Zone: Ambulance (T) (R) **1.55** Evolution (T) (R) **2.55** This Is BBC Two (T)

ITV1

6.0 **Good Morning Britain** (T) **10.0** This Morning (T) **1.30** News and Weather (T) **1.55** Local News and Weather (T) **2.0** Dickinson's Real Deal (T) (R) **3.0** Deal Or No Deal (T) (R) **4.0** Tipping Point (T) (R) **5.0** The Chase (T) (R) **6.0** Local News and Weather (T) **6.30** News and Weather (T) **7.30** Tom Kerridge Cooks Italy (T)

8.0 **Emmerdale** (T) Kev is thrilled, while Billy is in a determined mood.
8.30 **Coronation Street** (T) Tim takes in Richie's daughter without consulting Sally.
9.0 **The Chase Around the World** (T) The teams land in Zurich, where the players must solve questions to navigate the city and locate Bradley Walsh.

10.0 **News** (T) Weather
10.30 **Local News** (T) Weather
10.45 FILM **Quantum of Solace** (Marc Forster, 2008) (T) James Bond sets out on a personal mission of vengeance. Spy thriller, starring Daniel Craig.
12.35 **Shop on TV 3.0** The Summit (T) (R) **3.50** Unwind (T) **5.05** Deal Or No Deal (T) (R)

Channel 4

6.30 **The King of Queens** (T) (R) **7.45** Everybody Loves Raymond (T) (R) **9.10** Frasier (T) (R) **11.10** Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA (T) (R) **12.05** News (T) **12.10** Find It, Fix It, Flog It (T) (R) **1.10** The Great House Giveaway (T) (R) **2.10** Countdown (T) **3.0** A Place in the Sun (T) (R) **4.0** Saving Country Houses With Penelope Keith (T) (R) **5.0** Chateau DIY (T) (R) **6.0** American Pickers (T) (R) **7.0** News (T)

8.0 **Renovation Rescue** (T) Vogue Williams and Luke Mabbott help widow Fiona finally breathe new life into her beloved family home.
9.0 **Spy Next Door: The Anna Chapman Story** (T) Part two of two. The FBI reveals that Anna is just one of a sprawling web of Russian agents in the US.

10.0 **The Schoolgirl Terrorist?** (T)
11.05 **Social Media Monsters** (T) (R)
12.10 **Crime Scene Cleaners** (T) (R) **1.05** Secret Lives of Gypsy Wives (T) (R) **1.55** Ramsay's Hotel Hell (T) (R) **2.45** The Hitler Interviews (T) (R) **3.40** Fur Babies (T) (R) **4.35** House of Craft (T) (R) **4.55** Couples Come Dine With Me (T) (R) **5.50** Countdown (T) (R)

Channel 5

6.0 **Milkshake! 9.15** Jeremy Vine (T) **11.30** Storm & Alexis (T) **12.45** News (T) **12.50** Matt Allwright (T) **2.20** FILM The Replacement Daughter (Bruno Hernandez, 2024) (T) **4.0** Castle (T) (R) **4.55** Love Nature (T) (R) **5.0** News (T) **6.0** Crete: Jewel of the Med (T) (R) **6.55** News(T) **7.0** Around the World in First Class With Josie Gibson (T) **7.55** News (T)

8.0 **The Yorkshire Vet Special: Peter's Dream** (T) New series. Peter Wright sets out to create a Yorkshire pet memorial garden.
9.0 **Benidorm Is Murder** (T) Dennis and Rosa investigate when a cleaner finds a body, and untangle old resentments, loyalties and deceptive appearances.

10.0 **Killer at the Crime Scene** (T) (R) A case in California.
11.05 **The Body in the Thames** (T) (R) A murder from 2001.
12.05 **Street Cops: Catching the Yobs** (T) (R) **1.0** Cruise TV (T) (R) **2.0** Entertainment News (T) **2.10** GPs: Behind Closed Doors (T) (R) **3.05** Castle (T) (R) **3.50** Friends (T) (R) **4.35** Cruising (T) (R)

BBC Four

7.0 **Villages By the Sea** (T) (R) A lost harbour in Port Carlisle. **7.30** Wainwright Walks (T) (R) A trek up England's highest peak, Scafell Pike.

8.0 **Operation Mincemeat** (T) (R) How Britain deceived Hitler into thinking the allies were planning to invade Greece in 1943, allowing them to land in Sicily with minimal resistance.
9.0 **The Coen Brothers Story** (T) Actors and collaborators look at the Coen brothers' remarkable screen career.

10.0 FILM **Inside Llewyn Davis** (Ethan Coen, Joel Coen, 2013) (T) Drama, starring Oscar Isaac.
11.40 FILM **Shaft** (Gordon Parks, 1971) (T) Blaxploitation crime thriller.
1.15 **Wainwright Walks** (T) (R) **1.45** Operation Mincemeat (T) (R) **2.45** Villages By the Sea (T) (R)

Other channels

BBC Three

7.0pm The Catch Up **7.05** Deadly 60 **8.0** Sort Your Life Out With Stacey Solomon **9.0** **Better Date Than Never** **9.30** Better Date Than Never **10.30** RuPaul's Drag Race UK: Meet the Queens **10.55** FILM Bridget Jones's Baby (2016) **12.50** The Kim Kardashian Diamond Heist **1.35** The Trouble With Kanye **2.50** Better Date Than Never

U&Dave

6.0am Teleshopping **7.25** Top Gear **8.20** Border Force: America's Gatekeepers **9.20** Border Force: America's Gatekeepers **10.20** Rick Stein's Cornwall **10.50** Rick Stein's Cornwall **11.20** Yukon Gold **12.15** Top Gear **1.20** Top Gear **2.20** Mortimer & Whitehouse: Gone Fishing **3.0** Guy Martin: Proper Jobs **4.0** Hairy Bikers' Best of British **5.0** Rick Stein's Cornwall **5.30** Rick Stein's Cornwall **6.0** Rick Stein's Cornwall **6.30** Rick Stein's Cornwall **7.0** Mortimer & Whitehouse: Gone Fishing **7.40** Would I Lie to You? **9.0** Hit Point **10.0** Have I Got a Bit More News for You **11.0** Taskmaster **12.0** Mock the Week **12.40** Would I Lie to You? **2.0** Hit Point **2.50** Richard Osman's House of Games **3.35** Parks and Recreation **4.0** Teleshopping

E4

6.0am Modern Family **6.55** Rude(ish) Tube Shorts **7.0** Couples Come Dine With Me **8.0** Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA **10.0** America's Funniest Home Videos **11.0** Below Deck: Mediterranean **12.0** The Simpsons **1.30** The Simpsons **2.0** Brooklyn Nine-Nine **3.0** Modern Family **5.0** The Simpsons **8.0** Vanderpump Rules **9.0** Cruising Paradise: Above and Below Deck **10.0** Gogglebox **11.05** Naked Attraction **12.10** First Dates **1.15** Cruising Paradise: Above and Below Deck **2.15** Vanderpump Rules **3.05** Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA **3.55** The Simpsons **4.20** The Goldbergs **5.10** Brooklyn Nine-Nine

Film4

11.0am FILM Journey to the Center of the Earth (1959) **1.40** FILM Sherlock Holmes and the Secret Weapon (1942) **3.10** FILM The True Story of Jesse James (1957) **5.0** FILM Tolkien (2019) **7.10** FILM Moon (2009) **9.0** FILM The Woman King (2022) **11.40** FILM Anna (2019) **2.0** FILM Berberian Sound Studio (2012)

PBS America

6.0am Teleshopping **8.0** Weathered: Earth's Extremes **8.35** Digging Up Britain's Past **9.35** Walrus: Life on Thin Ice **10.45** Peleliu: WWII's Most Well-Preserved Battlefield **11.55** Inside Japan's War **1.0** Weathered: Earth's Extremes **1.35** Digging Up Britain's Past **2.35** Walrus: Life on Thin Ice **3.45** Peleliu: WWII's Most Well-Preserved Battlefield **4.55** Inside Japan's War **6.0** Digging Up Britain's Past **7.0** Walrus: Life on Thin Ice **8.10** Peleliu: WWII's Most Well-Preserved Battlefield **9.15** Inside Japan's War **10.20** Walrus: Life on Thin Ice **11.30** Weathered: Earth's Extremes **12.0** Peleliu: WWII's Most Well-Preserved Battlefield **1.15** Weathered: Earth's Extremes **2.0** Teleshopping

Sky One

6.0am Mornings **7.0** Mornings With Ridge and Frost **7.30** Mornings With Ridge and Frost **8.0** Stargate SG-1 **9.0** Stargate SG-1 **10.0** Will & Grace **11.0** The Simpsons **11.30** The Simpsons **12.0** Big Cats Small World **1.0** Hawaii Five-0 **3.0** S.W.A.T **5.0** The Simpsons **6.0** Animal Control **6.30** The Simpsons **7.0** The Simpsons **8.0** Rob & Romesh vs Magic in Vegas **9.0** The Dyers' Caravan Park **10.0** The Paper **10.30** The Paper **11.0** Animal Control **11.30** Grimm **12.30** The Force: Manchester **1.30** Road Wars **2.0** Frank Skinner: 30 Years of Dirt **3.0** Hawaii Five-0 **4.0** S.W.A.T **5.0** S.W.A.T

Sky Arts

6.0am The Wiz Live **8.0** Artist of the Year: Masterclass **8.30** Artist of the Year: Masterclass **9.0** Tales of the Unexpected **10.0** Alfred Hitchcock Presents **11.0** Discovering: Yul Brynner **12.0** The Art of Film With Ian Nathan **1.0** Tales of the Unexpected **2.0** The Alfred Hitchcock Hour **3.0** The Eighties **4.0** Discovering: Claude Rains **5.0** Portrait Artist of the Year 2022 **6.0** Tales of the Unexpected **7.0** Voices of the Valleys **8.0** Discovering: Michelle Pfeiffer **9.0** Clint Eastwood: A Life in Film **10.50** FILM I Am Alfred Hitchcock (2021) **12.30** Chaplin: The Birth of the Tramp **1.45** Laurel and Hardy: Their Lives and Magic **3.30** Inside Art: Lubaina Himid at Tate Modern **4.0** Skinner & Mina's Literary Road Trip: Pope & Swift **5.0** The Art of Film With Ian Nathan

Anna, Film4

Sky Atlantic

6.0am Fish Town **8.0** Billions **10.15** House of the Dragon **12.35** Homicide: Life on the Street **1.30** Homicide: Life on the Street **2.30** Billions **3.35** Billions **4.40** The Last of Us **5.35** The Last of Us **6.40** House of the Dragon **7.45** House of the Dragon **9.0** **Possession** **10.0** Possession **11.0** All Her Fault **12.05** House of the Dragon **2.45** Billions **5.0** The Guest Wing

Radio

Radio 3

6.30am Breakfast **9.30** Essential Classics **1.0** Classical Live. From the Proms, Alice Farnham conducts the National Open Youth Orchestra and players from BBC NOW in works by Vivaldi, Florence Price, Oliver Cross, Michael Betteridge and Charlotte Harding. Plus, from the Verbier festival, Debussy's Violin Sonata, with violinist Marc Bouchkov and pianist Julien Quentin. **4.0** Composer of the Week: Montgeroult - Behind Closed Doors (R) **5.0** In Tune **7.0** BBC Proms 2026. Live from the Royal Albert Hall, James Gaffigan conducts the BBC Symphony Orchestra and pianist Yeol Eum Son in Wynton Marsalis's Concerto for Orchestra, Gershwin's Piano Concerto in F and Barber's Symphony No 1 in One Movement. **10.0** Night Tracks **11.30** 'Round Midnight **12.30** Through the Night

Radio 4

6.0am Today **9.0** Natalie Haynes Stands Up for the Classics. A guide on using the Oracle to answer life's big questions. (3/7) **9.30** The Guitar Story. John Wilson explores how the instrument has driven cultural change. (2/4) **10.0** Woman's Hour **11.0** The Three Ages of Child (R) **11.45** Book of the Week: Hiroshima, 8.15: The Lost Memoir. By Kiyoshi Tanimoto and Koko Kondo. (4/5) **12.0** News **12.04** Scam Secrets (3/8) **12.32** Sliced Bread. Greg Foot investigates laundry detergents. (7/8) **12.57** Weather **1.0** The World at One **1.45** Human Intelligence. The mind of China's greatest female poet, Li Qingzhao. (14/15) **2.0** The Archers (R) **2.15** Security. Drama, by Kelly Jones. Donna takes a job as security at a supermarket to keep her mind off her missing daughter. But it only takes one shoplifter to ruin her plans. With Debra Baker and Shaun Dingwall. **3.0** This Natural Life. Explorer Phoebe Smith takes Martha Kearney to Tryfan in Eryri, Wales. (6/6) **3.27** Radio 4 Appeal (R) **3.30** Feedback **4.0** The Briefing Room **4.30** Inside Science **5.0** PM **5.57** Weather **6.0** News **6.30** Icklewick FM (R) **7.0** The Archers **7.15** Front Row **8.0** At Your Own Peril (R) **8.15** The Media Show (R) **9.0** Loose Ends (R) **9.45** The Cows Are Mad (R) **9.59** Weather **10.0** The World Tonight **10.45** Book at Bedtime: The Vicar of Wakefield. By Oliver Goldsmith. (9/10) **11.0** Radical **11.30** A Good Read (R) **12.0** News and Weather **12.30** Book of the Week: Hiroshima, 8.15: The Lost Memoir (R) **12.48** Shipping Forecast **1.0** As World Service **5.0** News **5.04** The Briefing Room (R) **5.32** Weather **5.34** Shipping Forecast **5.43** Prayer for the Day **5.45** Farming Today

Radio 4 Extra

6.0am The Wolf Far Hence (2/6) **6.30** The Senior Partner (4/8) **7.0** Capital Gains (4/4) **7.30** The Burkiss Way (3/15) **8.0** The Train at Platform 4 (1/4) **8.30** Adrian Mole: The Cappuccino Years (4/10) **8.45** Small Island (14/15) **9.0** Icklewick FM (2/6) **9.30** Following the Martian Invasion (4/5) **9.45** Daily Service **10.0** Great Lives (1/8) **10.30** From Ivory to Plastic **11.0** The Wolf Far Hence (2/6) **11.30** The Senior Partner (4/8) **12.0** Capital Gains (4/4) **12.30** The Burkiss Way (3/15) **1.0** The Train at Platform 4 (1/4) **1.30** Adrian Mole: The Cappuccino Years (4/10) **1.45** Small Island (14/15) **2.0** Dilemma (1/6) **2.30** The Change (6/6) **3.0** The Summer Book **3.45** Short Works **4.0** Great Lives (1/8) **4.30** From Ivory to Plastic **5.0** The Wolf Far Hence (2/6) **5.30** The Senior Partner (4/8) **6.0** Capital Gains (4/4) **6.30** The Burkiss Way (3/15) **7.0** The Train at Platform 4 (1/4) **7.30** Adrian Mole: The Cappuccino Years (4/10) **7.45** Small Island (14/15) **8.0** Dilemma (1/6) **8.30** The Change (6/6) **9.0** The Summer Book **9.45** Short Works **10.0** Comedy Club: Icklewick FM (2/6) **10.30** A Look Back at the Nineties (1/5) **10.55** The Comedy Club Interview **11.0** The Casebook of Max and Ivan (4/4) **11.30** Sophie Willan's Guide to Normality (2/4) **11.45** What's the Story, Ashley Storrie? (2/4) **12.0** Great Lives (1/8) **12.30** From Ivory to Plastic **1.0** The Wolf Far Hence (2/6) **1.30** The Senior Partner (4/8) **2.0** Capital Gains (4/4) **2.30** The Burkiss Way (3/15) **3.0** The Train at Platform 4 (1/4) **3.30** Adrian Mole: The Cappuccino Years (4/10) **3.45** Small Island (14/15) **4.0** Dilemma (1/6) **4.30** The Change (6/6) **5.0** The Summer Book **5.45** Short Works

Friday

Gardeners' World, BBC Two

BBC One

6.0 **Breakfast** (T) **9.30** Animal Park (T) (R) **10.0** Trace, Track, Get My Car Back (T) (R) **10.30** European Athletics Championships: Birmingham 2026 (T) **1.15** News (T) **1.40** Regional News and Weather (T) **1.50** News (T) **2.0** The Hairdresser Mysteries (T) **2.45** Escape to the Country (T) (R) **3.30** The Repair Shop (T) (R) **4.30** The Answer Run (T) **5.15** Pointless (T) (R) **6.0** News (T) **6.30** Regional News and Weather (T) **7.0** The One Show at 20 (T)

8.0 **European Athletics Championships: Birmingham 2026** (T) Gabby Logan presents further coverage of the evening session on day five from Alexander Stadium, including the men's 200m and women's 800m finals.

10.0 **News** (T)
10.30 **Regional News** (T) Weather
10.40 **Ann Droid** (T) Linda persuades Sue to go camping to see a meteor storm.
11.10 FILM **Mothers' Instinct** (Benoît Delhomme, 2024) (T) Drama, starring Anne Hathaway and Jessica Chastain.
12.40 **Weather** (T) **12.45** News (T)

BBC Two

6.30 **The Answer Run** (T) (R) **7.15** Money for Nothing (T) (R) **8.0** Sign Zone: Marcus Wareing Simply Provence (T) (R) **9.0** News (T) **10.30** Antiques Road Trip (T) (R) **11.15** Homes Under the Hammer (T) (R) **12.15** Bargain Hunt (T) (R) **1.0** House of Games (T) (R) **1.30** The Finish Line (T) (R) **2.15** Do You Know Your Place? (T) (R) **2.45** The Great Rift: Africa's Wild Heart (T) (R) **4.35** Vintage Antiques Roadshow (T) (R) **5.15** Flog It! (T) (R) **6.0** House of Games (T) (R) **6.30** Wild Reckoning (T) (R)

7.0 **European Athletics Championships: Birmingham 2026** (T) Day five action.
8.0 **Gardeners' World** (T) The drought is taking its toll on Longmeadow.
9.0 **Bergerac** (T) Arthur Wakefield prepares to throw Julien to the wolves.
9.45 **QI XL** (T) (R) Sandi Toksvig hosts an extended edition.

10.30 **Newsnight** (T) Weather
11.05 FILM **On Falling** (Laura Carreira, 2024) (T) A Portuguese worker in a Scottish warehouse faces loneliness and a struggle to make ends meet. Drama, starring Joana Santos and Iñes Vaz.
12.45 **Sign Zone** The Rapture (T) (R) **1.45** This Is BBC Two (T)

ITV1

6.0 **Good Morning Britain** (T) **10.0** This Morning (T) **1.30** News and Weather (T) **1.55** Local News and Weather (T) **2.0** Dickinson's Real Deal (T) (R) **3.0** Deal Or No Deal (T) (R) **4.0** Tipping Point (T) (R) **5.0** The Chase (T) (R) **6.0** Local News and Weather (T) **6.30** News and Weather (T) **7.30** Abbey Clancy: Celebrity Homes (T) (R)

8.0 **Emmerdale** (T) Ruby is thwarted, and Lewis surprises Kev with an announcement.
8.30 **Coronation Street** (T) Lucy's presence stirs up conflict on the street.
9.0 **Who Wants to Be a Millionaire? Celebrity Special** (T) (R) Steph McGovern and Dion Dublin compete for charity.

10.0 **The Twisted Tale of Amanda Knox** (T) Fact-based drama, with Grace Van Patten.
11.0 **News** (T) Weather
11.35 **Local News** (T) Weather
11.50 **Inside the Langham: Britain's First Grand Hotel** (T) (R)
12.15 **Shop on TV 3.0** Force of Nature (T) (R) **3.50** Long Lost Family (T) (R) **4.45** Unwind With ITV (T)

Channel 4

6.30 **The King of Queens** (T) (R) **7.45** Everybody Loves Raymond (T) (R) **9.10** Frasier (T) (R) **11.10** Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA (T) (R) **12.05** News (T) **12.10** Find It, Fix It, Flog It (T) (R) **1.10** The Great House Giveaway (T) (R) **2.10** Countdown (T) **3.0** A Place in the Sun (T) (R) **4.0** Saving Country Houses With Penelope Keith (T) (R) **5.0** Chateau DIY (T) (R) **6.0** American Pickers (T) (R) **7.0** News (T)

8.0 **Surgery Secrets of the Super Rich** (T) Emma has a nano-fat treatment to rejuvenate her under-eye shadows, whileJames faces an eight-hour hair transplant.
9.0 **8 Out of 10 Cats Does Countdown** (T) (R) Jon Richardson and Roisin Conaty take on Rob Beckett and Kiell Smith-Bynoe.

10.0 **Big Fat Quiz: Best Bits** (T) Compilation show.
11.05 **Sarah Millican: Chatterbox Live** (T) (R) Standup comedy.
12.10 **Bill Bailey Live: Part Troll** (T) (R) **1.35** Ramsay's Hotel Hell (T) (R) **2.25** Four in a Bed (T) (R) **4.35** Couples Come Dine With Me (T) (R) **5.30** Kirstie's House of Craft (T) (R) **5.40** A Place in the Sun (T) (R)

Channel 5

6.0 **Milkshake! 9.15** Jeremy Vine (T) **11.30** Storm & Alexis (T) **12.45** News (T) **12.50** Matt Allwright (T) **2.20** FILM My Husband's Seven Wives (Louise Alston, 2024) (T) **4.0** Castle (T) (R) **4.55** Love Nature (T) (R) **5.0** News (T) **6.0** Ibiza: Jewel of the Med (T) (R) **6.55** News (T) **7.0** Tom Read Wilson's Magnificent Journey (T) (R) **7.55** News (T)

8.0 **Alexander Armstrong in Sri Lanka** (T) (R) The presenter enjoys the country's golden sands and historic culture, beginning in the fortress town of Galle.
9.0 **The Big Drought of 1975** (T) (R) A look at a record-breaking spell of erratic weather in the UK that lasted for 16 months.

10.30 **Piers Morgan: Uncensored** (T) Opinion-led news.
12.05 **Fare Dodgers: At War With the Law** (T) (R) **1.0** Cruise TV (T) (R) **2.0** Entertainment News (T) **2.10** GPs: Behind Closed Doors (T) (R) **3.0** Castle (T) (R) **3.45** Friends (T) (R) **4.35** Cruising (T) (R) **5.25** Entertainment News (T) **5.35** Paw Patrol (T) (R)

BBC Four

7.0 **Beethoven's Seventh at the Proms** (T) Gustavo Dudamel and the LA Philharmonic perform works by Beethoven and Gabriela Ortiz.

8.35 **Top of the Pops** (R) An edition from 2000 including Geri Halliwell, Tom Jones and Stereophonics, and Five.
9.05 **Top of the Pops** (R) From 2000, including Macy Gray, Blink 182, ATB and Embrace.
9.35 **Top of the Pops** (T) (R) An edition from 1985. Featuring UB40 with Chrissie Hynde, Madonna and more.

10.05 **Top of the Pops** (T) (R) With It Bites, Lionel Richie, Anita Dobson, Phil Fearon and Chris de Burgh. From 1986.
10.35 **Ultimate Cover Versions at the BBC** (T) (R) Includes Moody Blues, Soft Cell and Sinead O'Connor.
11.35 **Ultimate Cover Versions at the BBC: Volume 2** (T) (R)
1.35 **Top of the Pops** (T) (R)

Other channels

BBC Three

7.0pm The Catch Up **7.05** Deadly 60 **7.30** FILM Night at the Museum: Secret of the Tomb (2014) **9.0** Death in Paradise **10.0** Ghosts Australia **11.15** **He Had It Coming** **2.35** My Mate's a Bad Date **2.55** Death in Paradise

U&Dave

6.0am Teleshopping **7.25** Top Gear **8.20** Border Force: America's Gatekeepers **10.20** Rick Stein's Cornwall **10.55** Rick Stein's Cornwall **11.25** Yukon Gold **12.20** Top Gear **1.20** Top Gear **2.20** Mortimer & Whitehouse: Gone Fishing **3.0** Guy Martin: Proper Jobs **4.0** Hairy Bikers' Best of British **5.0** Rick Stein's Cornwall **5.30** Rick Stein's Cornwall **6.0** Rick Stein's Cornwall **6.30** Rick Stein's Cornwall **7.0** Mortimer & Whitehouse: Gone Fishing **7.40** Would I Lie to You? **8.20** QI XL **9.25** Would I Lie to You? At Christmas **10.0** Magnum PI **12.0** Mock the Week **12.40** Would I Lie to You? **1.20** Would I Lie to You? At Christmas **2.0** QI XL **2.50** Richard Osman's House of Games **3.35** Parks and Recreation **4.0** Teleshopping

E4

6.0am Modern Family **6.55** Rude(ish) Tube Shorts **7.0** Couples Come Dine With Me **8.0** Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA **9.0** Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA **10.0** America's Funniest Home Videos **11.0** Below Deck: Mediterranean **12.0** The Simpsons **1.0** The Simpsons **1.30** The Simpsons **2.0** Brooklyn Nine-Nine **2.30** Brooklyn Nine-Nine **3.0** Modern Family **3.30** Modern Family **4.0** Modern Family **4.30** Modern Family **5.0** The Simpsons **5.30** The Simpsons **6.0** The Simpsons **6.30** The Simpsons **7.0** The Simpsons **7.30** The Simpsons **8.0** Vanderpump Rules **9.0** Gogglebox **10.0** FILM American Reunion (2012) **12.10** Naked Attraction **1.10** Gogglebox **2.15** Vanderpump Rules **3.05** Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA **3.55** The Goldbergs **4.45** Brooklyn Nine-Nine **5.10** Brooklyn Nine-Nine **5.35** Brooklyn Nine-Nine

Film4

11.0am FILM Cleopatra (1963) **3.45** FILM Siege of the Saxons (1963) **5.30** FILM The Battle at Apache Pass (1952) **7.15** FILM Horizon Line (2020) **9.0** FILM Fury (2014) **11.40** FILM The Invitation (2022) **1.45** FILM Infinity Pool (2023)

PBS America

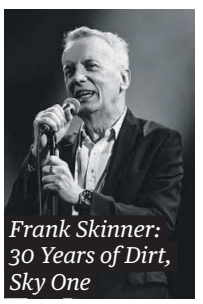
6.0am Teleshopping **8.0** Weathered: Earth's Extremes **8.35** Digging Up Britain's Past **9.35** The Real Truth **10.40** Battle of Okinawa in Colour **11.50** Fall of Japan in Colour **1.0** Weathered: Earth's Extremes **1.35** Digging Up Britain's Past **2.35** The Real Truth **3.40** Battle of Okinawa in Colour **4.50** Fall of Japan in Colour **5.50** Digging Up Britain's Past **6.50** The Real Truth **7.55** Battle of Okinawa in Colour **9.0** Fall of Japan in Colour **10.0** The Real Truth **11.10** Weathered: Earth's Extremes **12.0** Battle of Okinawa in Colour **1.05** Weathered: Earth's Extremes **2.0** Teleshopping

Sky One

6.0am Mornings With Jones and Melbourne **8.0** Stargate SG-1 **10.0** Will & Grace **11.0** The Simpsons **12.0** Big Cats Small World **1.0** Hawaii Five-0 **3.0** S.W.A.T **5.0** The Simpsons **5.30** The Simpsons **6.0** The Simpsons **6.30** The Simpsons **7.0** The Simpsons **7.30** The Simpsons **8.0** An Idiot Abroad 2 **9.0** **Frank Skinner: 30 Years of Dirt** **10.0** **Grimsburg** **11.30** An Idiot Abroad 2 **12.30** Grimm **1.30** The Force: Manchester **2.30** Road Wars **3.0** Hawaii Five-0 **4.0** S.W.A.T **5.0** Portrait Artist of the Year 2022 **6.0** Tales of the Unexpected **6.30** Tales of the Unexpected **7.0** Alfred Hitchcock Presents **7.30** Alfred Hitchcock Presents **8.0** Guy Garvey: From the Vaults **9.0** The Thousand and One Musical Lives of Fleetwood Mac **10.15** Classic Albums **11.35** Fleetwood Mac: Live in Boston **12.45** Fleetwood Mac: Live in Boston **2.0** The Eagles: Desperado **3.30** Discovering: Eagles **4.0** Skinner & Mina's Literary Road Trip: Pope & Swift **5.0** The Sky Arts Book Club Summer Reads Special

Sky Arts

6.0am André Rieu: La Vie Est Belle **7.45** Artist of the Year: Masterclass **8.45** Tales of the Unexpected **9.50** Alfred Hitchcock Presents **10.25** Alfred Hitchcock Presents **11.0** Discovering: Claude Rains **12.0** FILM Seven Dials Mystery (1981) **2.30** Tales of the Unexpected **3.0** The Eighties **4.0** Discovering: Janet Leigh


Frank Skinner: 30 Years of Dirt, Sky One

Sky Atlantic

6.0am Fish Town **7.0** Fish Town **8.0** Billions **9.05** Billions **10.15** House of the Dragon **11.25** House of the Dragon **12.35** Homicide: Life on the Street **1.30** Homicide: Life on the Street **2.30** Billions **3.35** Billions **4.35** The Last of Us **5.40** The Last of Us **6.40** House of the Dragon **7.45** House of the Dragon **9.0** Station Eleven **10.0** Station Eleven **11.0** House of the Dragon **12.15** House of the Dragon **1.40** Billions **2.40** Billions **3.40** The Guest Wing **4.35** Sort Of **5.05** Urban Secrets

Radio

Radio 3

6.30am Breakfast **9.30** Essential Classics **1.0** Classical Live. From the Proms, Gustavo Dudamel conducts the Los Angeles Philharmonic in Beethoven's Symphony No 6 in F major, 'Pastoral". Plus, from Copenhagen's Festival & Friends, Poulenc's Flute Sonata, with flautist Otilia Zielke and pianist Sergei Redkin. **4.0** Composer of the Week: Montgeroult (R) **5.0** In Tune **7.0** BBC Proms 2026. Live from the Royal Albert Hall, Edwin Outwater conducts the BBC Concert Orchestra in a tribute to a Marvin Gaye. **10.0** Late Junction. Verity Sharp shares a collaboration session between Greek singer Savina Yannatou and Indonesian composer Johanes "Mo'ong" Santoso Pribadi. **11.30** 'Round Midnight **12.30** Through the Night

Radio 4

6.0am Today **9.0** Desert Island Discs (R) **10.0** Woman's Hour **11.0** The Food Programme. Dan Saladino meets the musicians who played - and cooked - at this year's Womad festival in Wiltshire. **11.45** Book of the Week: Hiroshima, 8.15: The Lost Memoir. By Kiyoshi Tanimoto and Koko Kondo. (5/5) **12.0** News **12.04** Rare Earth. How architects can clean up the climate impact of building. (1/6) **12.57** Weather **1.0** The World at One **1.45** Human Intelligence. The legacy of Nikola Tesla. (15/15) **2.0** The Archers (R) **2.15** Central Intelligence. Fact-based espionage drama, by Greg Haddrick. As the Vietnam war deepens and the Middle East edges towards war, the president demands answers he may not want to hear. With Kim Cattrall and Johnny Flynn. (6/10) **2.45** Living on the Edge (R) **3.0** Gardeners' Question Time **3.45** Short Works. Staying Alive, by Roisín O'Donnell. **4.0** Last Word **4.30** Sideways (R) **5.0** PM **5.57** Weather **6.0** News **6.30** The People Have Spoken. Ian Smith looks for satirical solutions to the world's problems. (1/3) **7.0** The Archers **7.15** Add to Playlist. Soweto Kinch and NoLay select tracks by Black British music artists. (1/6) **8.0** Any Questions? **8.55** This Week in History (R) **9.0** Natalie Haynes Stands Up for the Classics (R) **9.30** Breakin' the Cycle (R) **9.59** Weather **10.0** The World Tonight **10.45** Book at Bedtime: The Vicar of Wakefield. By Oliver Goldsmith. (10/10) **11.0** Americast **11.30** A Good Read (R) **12.0** News and Weather **12.30** Book of the Week: Hiroshima, 8.15: The Lost Memoir (R) **12.48** Shipping Forecast **1.0** As World Service **5.30** News Summary **5.34** Shipping Forecast **5.43** Prayer for the Day. With Professor Alison Jack. **5.45** Living on the Edge (R)

Radio 4 Extra

6.0am The Wolf Far Hence (3/6) **6.30** The Senior Partner (5/8) **7.0** Flying the Flag (1/8) **7.30** Beyond Our Ken (4/20) **8.0** The Confessional (5/6) **8.30** Adrian Mole: The Cappuccino Years (5/10) **8.45** Small Island (15/15) **9.0** Olga Koch: OK Computer (2/4) **9.30** Following the Martian Invasion (5/5) **9.45** Daily Service **10.0** Soul Music (1/4) **10.30** Pilot **11.0** The Wolf Far Hence (3/6) **11.30** The Senior Partner (5/8) **12.0** Flying the Flag (1/8) **12.30** Beyond Our Ken (4/20) **1.0** The Confessional (5/6) **1.30** Adrian Mole: The Cappuccino Years (5/10) **1.45** Small Island (15/15) **2.0** The Museum of Curiosity (4/6) **2.30** Millport (4/6) **3.0** The Hunting of the Snark **3.45** Short Works **4.0** Soul Music (1/4) **4.30** Pilot **5.0** The Wolf Far Hence (3/6) **5.30** The Senior Partner (5/8) **6.0** Flying the Flag (1/8) **6.30** Beyond Our Ken (4/20) **7.0** The Confessional (5/6) **7.30** Adrian Mole: The Cappuccino Years (5/10) **7.45** Small Island (15/15) **8.0** The Museum of Curiosity (4/6) **8.30** Millport (4/6) **9.0** The Hunting of the Snark **9.45** Short Works **10.0** Comedy Club: Olga Koch - OK Computer (2/4) **10.30** Njambi McGrath: Becoming Njambi (4/4) **10.45** Rhys James Is (4/4) **11.0** Vent (6/6) **11.30** Laura Solon: Talking and Not Talking (5/6) **12.0** Soul Music (1/4) **12.30** Pilot **1.0** The Wolf Far Hence (3/6) **1.30** The Senior Partner (5/8) **2.0** Flying the Flag (1/8) **2.30** Beyond Our Ken (4/20) **3.0** The Confessional (5/6) **3.30** Adrian Mole: The Cappuccino Years (5/10) **3.45** Small Island (15/15) **4.0** The Museum of Curiosity (4/6) **4.30** Millport (4/6) **5.0** The Hunting of the Snark **5.45** Short Works

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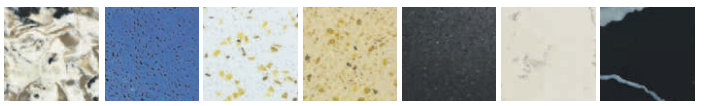

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- Option to include new appliances
- Finishing touches available
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- Fitted in 48 hours*

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